

The DRIFT
OF PINIONS

— Robert Keable —



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PRESENTED BY Dr

THE DRIFT OF PINIONS.

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THE DRIFT OF PINIONS

By ROBERT KEABLE,

Author of "*A City of the Dawn*," etc.

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

NEW YORK:
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NOTE.—For leave to reprint such of these as have appeared in "THE TREASURY" I have to thank the Editor of that Magazine.

Gift
Publisher
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DEDICATION.

MY DEAR STEPHANIE,

It seems years ago since you, among the first, were good enough to like my stories, and, still better, that great subject with which most of them had to do. Do you remember how I would sit on the buffet by the side of the big fire, and how you would lose yourself in the depths of the great chair opposite? Others there were, but I think you understood the best of all, although you said so little while the firelight flickered on your hair. Most of the stories of this book I did not know then; but indeed I think "the drift of pinions" against my door has grown with the years, and that therefore you will like these at least as well. At any rate, I offer them to you, in very grateful remembrance (but with a little wistfulness) of the days that come not again.

But this alone will not quite content you. I remember, if you do not, that you would always lean forward at the close of a story and say: "*Is it really true?*" And you will be sure to want to know that same about my stories now.

I can content you: I would not dare to play with the "traffic of Jacob's ladder." I have no use for stories that are not true of that wonderful land to which it leads—especially in these days, when all of us have such interests there. But you must forgive

me if I have very thoroughly disguised my stories, and, in their own interest, dared to set them in frames of my own that seem best to show them up. Tell your friends not to try to guess identities! *Camouflage*, you know, is well learnt here.

So read idly, shall we say. Sit back in your chair by the fire this winter, and try to forget for a little that there is hell let loose on earth. Trust me: I tell you that I know, that the land that is very far off is very near, and that the King may be seen there in His Beauty. You will believe it, Stephanie?

Ever yours,

R. K.

B.E.F., FRANCE.

In the Octave of the Angels, 1917.

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CHAPTER I

IN NO STRANGE LAND

"No ; I don't see exactly what you mean," said the little lady, a trifle impatiently perhaps. "I can believe you're not avoiding a straight issue, because I know you, but I'm certain other people might call it an attempt to do so. You've no right to change every outward circumstance in a story and then call it true. If an angel appeared to a Mosuto in this garden, you've no right to tell, on that account, as a 'true' story, how Gabriel appeared to a Frenchman in the trenches. The mentality of the Mosuto has a distinct bearing on the likelihood of the event ; and so might the environment of the trenches, and the imminence of sudden death, affect the judgment of a Frenchman."

The ugly-looking man in the wicker chair, sitting next her under the mimosa, looked up thoughtfully and gazed at her a minute before replying. Then he leant forward to pick a fallen leaf out of his teacup which stood on the little table between them, and spoke as he did it.

"Yes," he said, "you're right in a way. At least I can see that it should be made plain, before the story is told, that that has been done, if only to indicate the view of things that makes one rather like such a transformation process, and also to discredit, at the start, a good deal of the criticism that is usually made about stories of this sort. But your common sense is not going to browbeat my spirit sense."

"Explain," she put in, leaning forward a little.

"Well," he said, "take the last first. People bring entirely false standards to the test of the supernatural. By hypothesis, the supernatural is not the natural, and it is not therefore to be, at least finally and conclusively, tested by the standards one applies to the natural. Spiritual things must be judged by spiritual tests. You don't lick a picture to find out if it's pretty, and a Gothic cathedral may be the most wonderful song in stone imaginable, but a blind man cannot hear it. Well, now, I maintain that we know so little about the supernatural that we honestly don't know by what to test it. People demand that a spirit shall prove itself intangible; I fail to see the necessity. They insist that the environment and psychology of the seer of the vision have a great deal to do with the likelihood of his seeing at all in the first place, and of what he sees in the second. I believe that there is a spiritual world entirely indifferent to human psychology and environment, so far as any limitation of its activities is involved; indeed, I am inclined to believe that any manifestation which appears to depend entirely upon such things united in the person of some one or other medium, is likely to be either not strictly supernatural at all, or, at best, the activity of a much inferior and probably debased portion of the spirit world."

"And the Mosuto in this garden?"

"Well, it's a good case. I think we lay far too much stress on the Mosuto and the garden in every instance. If there is to be a genuine angel-visit, I'm perfectly certain that it is indifferent to the angel whether he comes to this garden or to the trenches, to a Mosuto or a Frenchman, in war or peace, by day or night—though I will admit that I think there is one thing for which he looks. I don't think he troubles much

about race or place, but I think he looks for the characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven. And the Kingdom of Heaven is within you, remember. . . . So I don't believe it matters in the least how I disguise my story, provided I keep the things of the spirit the same throughout."

His companion smiled. "I see," she said. Then :

The gates of heaven are lightly locked,
We do not guard our gain,
The heaviest hind may easily
Come silently and suddenly
Upon me in a lane ;

And any little maid that walks
In good thoughts apart,
May break the guard of the Three Kings,
And see the dear and dreadful things
I hid within my heart

she quoted. "That's what our Lady said, according to G. K. C., and I suppose it's much what you mean?"

He nodded.

A little silence fell between them, as it may fall between friends, a silence in which communication did not, however, cease. On the contrary, something beyond speech seemed to be explaining the one to the other. Across the lawn and the new rose-garden, and the dip down to the spruit that was full of young willows, where the rough road wound up and round a kopje, a Scotch-cart was lumbering slowly along, driven by a couple of red-shirted prisoners. The man watched it intently, and you might have thought he was speculating upon it. So he was—in a manner.

"You see," he went on suddenly, "I don't believe, to go on with, that we have any true idea as to the real values of sensory objects at all. Scent, touch, sight, hearing—these are not delusions, as some have thought, most emphatically not, and the objects which we apprehend by them are not delusions either.

But I feel equally certain that the reality of anything is not what we take it to be. . . . It's hard to express, but what I mean is this : I don't believe that trees, beasts, flowers, rocks, the very earth, are only fleeting phantoms ; I believe that they have, or will have, some real value in the spiritual world ; but at the same time I am pretty sure that we have no idea what that value is, and that there is no objective reality in the sense-impressions themselves."

The lady leaned back and her brown eyes glistened. "You mean that this garden may be just, in truth—well, the robe of God ? " she queried.

"Yes," he said, reverently.

"So you see where that gets you to," he went on, rather excitedly. "In the first place, if there is to be any sort of manifestation, that spiritual world is bound to wear a dress composed of our sense-impressions, including, very likely, that of materiality ; but I decline to believe that that dress has any objective reality either, or that you can argue anything from it. If an angel wishes to approach a soul on earth in anything other than (for the man) a purely spiritual manner, he must approach by means of sense-impressions ; moreover, if he wants to inform the individual that he is an angel, he must approach in such sense-wise that he is recognised as such. If an angel wanted to approach you, now, as an angel, it would be no use his coming as a prisoner in a red shirt with the broad-arrow on it, with a black face sticking out, and with language that would sound to you, down the telephone which we call hearing, as commonplace Sesuto remarks. You would say he was not an angel, but a Mosuto prisoner. But so, too, I can see not the least reason in the world why Sir Oliver Lodge's son, Raymond, should not speak to his father of whisky-sodas and cigars in the spiritual

world. Doubtless there are no such things there, but neither are there harps and vials. Granted Raymond—about whom, by the way, I express no opinion—there is no reason why he should not use such a form of language to convey an idea—though what that idea may be I have hardly the faintest conception. But *that* doesn't surprise me. I am perfectly certain that this side of death I shall never understand at all what reality of the spiritual world it is which produces upon me the sense-impression that we call whisky-soda ! ”

“ All the same, the whisky-soda notion jars me,” said his hearer, without a smile.

“ You're right, too, I'm pretty sure. I should be sorry if the spiritual world had to use such a dress in which to convey something to me, or to convey something about a person I loved. Mind you, we may be wrong. For heaven's sake, don't let us argue as if there were anything more actually evil or earthly in whisky than in water, but I feel that the real value of a great many things is raised or lowered by our use of the sense-impressions we get from them. Well, there's not much doubt but that the human use of whisky has depressed it pretty low ! But let's drop that. The second great deduction I make is this : I believe that often the spiritual world does not wish us to know that it has obtruded, and that therefore the dress it assumes is such that it is not determinable whether or no the affair is a manifestation of the spiritual, or not. . . . Do you know of Panhandle ? ”

“ No ; who is he ? ”

“ Get Professor Jacks to tell you. The point is that he was a ghost all the time, and the Professor never knew it. *He* dressed himself up in whisky-sodas and so on—and sky-signs, and shot-guns, and——”

The brown eyes twinkled. "That's fiction," she said. "I can see you're ragging me. But I'll read it sometime. Just now, though, do you know a story to show me what you mean?"

"Yes," he said, thoughtfully, "I do."

"Well, tell it me," she pleaded.

"Pour me out another cup of tea, then," he said, "and let me light a cigarette. Their spiritual values, anyway, are——"

"Oh, shut up," she laughed. "Here you are. Now fire away. Only I shall know that you've put any dress you thought fit, on an otherwise true incident."

"Have it that way if you like," he said; "only remember that the characteristic of this glimpse of the spiritual world, if it were a glimpse, was that it showed hardly a trace of its being a strange land at all. That is the point of it. Therefore I'm not sure that it was a manifestation. I think—but, there, I'll say no more. Judge for yourself." And then, while the butterflies danced across the flowers, he told his tale.

"It was in Paris, before the war, but not long before, just at the time when the Anti-clerical legislation was pretty nearly at its worst. That legislation was popular, too, to a great extent, and in any case it had given a handle to the dregs of the people which they were not slow to fit into the weapon of their lust and greed. I, then, was staying in Paris, with that Abbé of whom I have often told you, and although it was time for me to return to England, I could not bring myself to leave him. His little church had its door locked on to the back street in which it stood, and the faithful slipped in at the side. Every day in the very early dawn we would go down, he looking

so frail, and I feeling fearful, and the old sacristan, who had served the office for a generation, would meet us by the little side entrance. He would open the door, and stand there on guard while we made ready for Mass—though he would not have been much use as guard anyway. The Abbé would vest in the little sacristy, with a back glance over his shoulder now and again, and the little congregation would gather—a woman with a child or two, an old bent bookseller from the barrows near Notre Dame, who never missed, and two who had been used to pass the streets in the habit of their order, and now could not. And I would kneel at the back and watch it all, and take the sacrist's place when the Abbé went to the altar and the old man served him. The dull light used to filter in through the dusty glass, and shine on the dingy Renaissance altar with its gilded angels and heavy Madonna and wax flowers and brown and gold reliquaries—and holy priest. For he was holy, and I would, at the last, have changed not so much as a glass case of wax flowers, since they were knit up in some way with his spirit. And then he would come down and kneel for the Pope's prayers, and his thin voice, so acute in its cry, always brought tears to my eyes at the last:

“ ‘ Sacred Heart of Jesus—Have mercy upon us.’ ”

“ During the day he went out but seldom, and then only at a sick-call. I, too, had lost a great deal of my love for Paris, for the sufferings and fears of the Church had taken hold on me. Paris seemed drunken in her beauty and fury. The gay restaurant life, the moving crowds, the thronged shops—I had used to love them, but now Paris seemed to me like some wanton, painted and daubed, that played with souls for sport. I would go, perhaps, to the Bois; or to the bookstalls, for a chat, if we could get out of

ear-shot, with the faithful old fellow who sold there ; or to the heights of Montmartre—but little where else, until the evening. But after supper, with his office said, my friend and I would slip out to the river and walk by the bridges and the water, almost unseen.

“ One night we had strayed farther than we intended. The moon had stamped the towers of the great Cathedral out against the sky, and had deepened to black the shadows of the bridges on the water, and of the trees on the boulevards ; and we had walked far, almost in silence, drinking in the beauty of the night. As a matter of fact, we had reached a part of the city that I did not know at all, and I was just about to say to the priest that I thought we should be returning, when I felt him clutch my arm.

“ ‘ Dick,’ he said, ‘ look over there—under the trees across the way—can you see anything ? ’

“ I looked. It was not so easy to see, but I thought I could make out two or three figures. I said as much.

“ ‘ They’re following us, Dick,’ said the Abbé ; ‘ we ought not to have come so far. It is a bad quarter just here, and they look to me very like Apaches. Let us turn back.’

“ ‘ Well, not in a hurry,’ said I, ‘ or they will think we suspect something. Stop and look at the water a minute, naturally, and then turn back.’

“ We did so. We stood there, looking down at the moon-lit water, the priest’s arm through mine, for what seemed interminable minutes, while no one moved across the road ; and then, turning round, we set off back, down the deserted boulevard, towards the lights of more-inhabited Paris.

“ But we had hardly turned, before a party of three men and one woman crossed the road towards

our side, plainly to cut off our retreat. 'Keep on,' I whispered, 'maybe they will do nothing'; and without, I think, quickening our pace perceptibly, we walked on. I could hear the Abbé praying beneath his breath.

"The party reached the pathway ten yards or so before us, and glanced behind them. Then, seeing they were plainly alone, they spread out across the pavement and all attempt at concealment died out of their faces.

"The Abbé stopped me. 'What is it you want, my children?' he asked them.

"'Your life, you black—devil,' spat out one of them without another word, and drew a knife.

"My heart stood still: I don't think I could have moved if I had been alone. There was nobody in sight, and in any case I knew only too well what would be the temper of any Paris crowd from that quarter. Yet even then I remember noticing how the light from the nearest lamp-standard ahead twinkled and laughed on the rippling water before us.

"'Run,' cried my friend, dragging me round on the instant. I caught sight of the woman's face as he did so, and the horror that thrilled me then did something to stir me into life. Till that night I did not believe that a soul could be devil-possessed, but a devil of lust and hate stared from that woman's white face—and a young woman she was, too. I heard her laugh and yell: 'After them, my braves. And keep the little priest for me!' and we were away.

"I suppose terror does lend one wings; anyway, I ran as I have never run before; and although those street Apaches know how to run, I had been counted good at the 'Varsity, and the little Abbé in the old days, not so long before, had been athletic enough, too.

So, somehow, we distanced them at first. We had been compelled to run away from home and the more populous streets, and we were soon at a place at which we must turn inland from the river. We did so, doubling down one street, up and down another, and gradually losing what we had gained. 'Where are we?' I managed to gasp at one corner, and the Abbé just replied: 'Don't know.' It was a terrible prospect. Every house we flew by was dark and still; a good many shuttered shops offered us still less hope of help; and we had neither breath nor courage to cry for assistance.

"And then, so quickly that a few seconds sufficed for it all, came the rescue. We had darted round a corner, and were running down a street, when we noticed that the houses had given place to a high wall and that in the wall was a little door, ajar, from which came a pencil of yellow light. The little Abbé was nearest the wall, and it was he who gasped, 'In there.' In a second, and just as we could hear the feet of our pursuers coming round the corner, we pushed open the door and darted in.

"Now I cannot hope to make you feel our incredible amazement at what we found inside. We were in a small chapel, stone-pillared and flagged; before us was an altar with eight or ten lights blazing on it, and in the centre of the lights, in a monstrance, the Blessed Sacrament. And before the altar, at a prie-dieu, praying, a nun knelt in her habit, who neither moved at our sudden noisy entry, nor stirred at all when we left. As I say, we blundered in. Personally, I was half dazed by the light and the contrast. It was simply Heaven after Hell. I don't think I thought for a second of what our pursuers might do; I just gasped half-audibly: 'Oh, my God,' and staggered forward to kneel at a high chair, bow my

head and close my eyes, and try to stay the beating of my heart.

“ But I did hear the Abbé push the door to, and I was conscious that he came swiftly forward and stood by me, irresolute. Practically at once, however, the footsteps reached the door, the handle rattled, and the door itself was opened. Then there followed a kind of eternity. I braced myself to get up on the instant and do battle to push the Apache without and close the door ; I reproached myself that in the overwhelming amazement of my surprise I had not held it ; and I struggled with a kind of torrent of hideous thoughts as to what might happen to that kneeling nun and that which she adored—for, remember, men stopped at nothing in those days. I tell you, it seemed an instant hanging on the brink of eternity. I was all but springing up ; I seemed to know I would be up in a second ; and yet that second died out and lengthened, and still I knelt.

“ And then the door banged, and the Abbé gave a choking sob and fell on his knees at my side. I looked up at him, and could see that he was but praying through tears, and so again I hid my face. No sound of steps or voices reached us—no sound at all save that once a bit of wax fell from a candle on to the altar. We waited perhaps an hour, and then I rose to my feet. The Abbé’s white face looked up at me, but we neither of us spoke. I genuflected and stole silently to the door. I listened ; I could hear nothing. I opened it bit by bit, ever so slowly, and peered out : the street was empty. I beckoned the priest, and he came to me. ‘ Shall we go ? ’ I whispered, and he nodded. Together we stole out, and in fears enough, but, unseen and unmolested, reached, in half an hour or so, a street my friend knew, and so at length his house.

"We hardly spoke on that rapid half-walk, half-run home, but once in his study, my friend faced me.

" 'Dick,' said he, 'what do you make of it?' and his voice trembled.

" 'Make of it?' I queried, for I did not understand the drift of his meaning. He made a gesture of impatience.

" 'First,' he said, ticking the points off on his fingers, 'the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and even, as you know, its Reservation, except under most peculiar and stringent circumstances, is forbidden to-day in Paris. Secondly, I know Paris well, and there is no Order of Perpetual Adoration left. Thirdly, by what conceivable carelessness could the door into the street from such a chapel have been left open? Fourthly—although I admit this is not conclusive—how came the nun never to stir or to have her vigil relieved, though we were there a long time? And fifthly, what did the man see at the door which prevented him and his friends from coming in?'

" 'Oh!' I said, 'as to that, the sudden sight of the chapel and the Sacrament, as with us, acted upon him so strongly that he could not break its sanctity.'

" 'Ah!' said the priest with a French shrug of his shoulders. 'My friend, you do not know these poor souls. . . . No, it was just such a heaven as they love to make into hell. Why, I tell you, when I saw where we were, I was for going out and on, and trying to save it. Only there was no time, and as soon as that man opened the door, the sight of his face stopped me.'

" 'His face?' queried I, stupidly.

" 'Yes, his face,' repeated the Abbé, impatiently. 'My friend Dick, what would you have expected to see on his face?'

“ ‘ Well,’ said I, hesitatingly, ‘ I don’t know. Astonishment, of course, at finding himself at a chapel door. Fear, I should have thought, on my assumption that it was a sense of sanctity that kept him out ; but on yours, well, triumph perhaps.

“ ‘ Exactly,’ exclaimed the Abbé, exultantly, ‘ and it was just because there were no such emotions there, that I was arrested where I stood. My friend, I could swear that he saw *nothing*. Into what he thought the door opened, I do not know ; but this I know, that his face, as I saw it, was flushed and hot and eager, as you would expect from the chase, and that it changed absolutely not at all. He looked in, and out again in a second, as one might hastily snatch open a cupboard door, and find nothing, and close it.’

“ He stopped, with a gesture. I stared at him. ‘ But they must have seen that we were not in the street into which we had plainly turned a minute before,’ I objected.

“ The Abbé lifted his hands, with a shrug, and elevated his eyebrows. Then, peering at me eagerly, he almost whispered : ‘ And did you hear their footsteps departing ? ’

“ I looked at him with a sudden sense of awe. ‘ Why, no,’ I said ; and silence fell between us as we stood there.”

.
The story-teller threw away his cigarette, which had gone out, and lifted a warning hand. “ No, my dear,” he said. “ Don’t ask questions. There’s absolutely no more to be said, except perhaps this : that my friend made inquiries from authorities who were positive that no such infringement of the ecclesiastical rule of the time could have been possible, and who were, moreover, plainly distrustful of my friend when he pressed them, for they asserted that no such Order

existed, or had existed (so far as they knew) in that quarter of Paris. He and I, with some English friends of mine, tried to retrace our steps, but could not, though that in itself is not surprising—we had been lost, and Paris is labyrinthine in certain parts. Nor can I aid your curiosity about the chapel. At the time, I had no thought but that all was normal, although providentially fortunate, and I noted nothing in the chapel to give any indication of date or place. And even now I absolutely decline to pass a judgment. It is not a matter for judgment. No hypothesis, natural or non-natural, can be either proved or disproved. Only one thing I know: our lives were saved by a miracle that night, and no explanation that I may learn, hereafter, will surprise me."

The little woman smiled. "You stupid person," she said, "I wasn't even going to ask that sort of question. But I am wondering where, when, and to whom it all happened, and what it was that happened—in short, the truth that makes it true."

But Dick will tell neither her nor anyone.

CHAPTER II

OUR LADY'S PAIN

GEOGRAPHICALLY Basutoland is one and undivided, but those who work in it labour under no such delusion. It is not one land but two. There is the Lesuto, the fertile strip that lies to the west of the Malutis, bordered by the Free State on the one hand and the mountains on the other, the land of mealies and shops, the land whose people ought to be well off but never seem to have much to give away ; and then there is the Sehonghong, the land of rivers, which rise for the most part in Mont aux Sources, and flow down parallel to the steep Natal border, where are kranzes that drop several thousand feet in sheer descent to the plains below. Here are river-valleys deep in wheatfields, and few white men, and seeming poverty, but riches of kind and of generosity that are not much known in the Lesuto. In between the two, over that first barrier as one comes from the Lesuto, lies a no-man's land of hill upon hill, rough and rugged and inhospitable, although a thousand clear streams and scores of fantastic peaks, often white with snow against the blue of the sky, make it a land of great delight. Almost anywhere, by any of the half-dozen-odd passes and tracks, euphemistically designated roads, by which one can travel from the Lesuto to the Sehonghong, and back, there are rather more than twenty-four hours to be spent between the last settlements of the one and the first huts of the other. The traveller has a long, hard, solitary day and a lonely night before him when he leaves his outpost camp, and then, some time or another before the set of the next day's

sun, he will be among villages once more. It is just the one night's camp between, for which it will be impossible to get a roof over one's head if it rains or snows, difficult to procure firewood, hopeless to think of milk.

Of course, if one journeyed with a wagon none of these things would matter, but only the mountain ponies can scramble up those tiny trails to the 10,000-foot level, or make their way, like so many cats, among the crags and steeps of the constant climbing that follows. So one looks forward to a camp, jolly in the spring, possibly uncomfortable in summer when the thunder-storms are about, nastily cold in autumn; dangerous among the snows of winter, but lonely all the year round. And yet no one who has watched the moon creep up the steep mountain side till the red glow of the fire is black in her radiance, or lain, rolled in blankets, while the sharp peaks about glow in the rosy dawn, but dreams of the night that shall find him once again between Sehonghong and Lesuto.

For all that, Michael Carlile, the missionary, was not in the happiest of tempers as his pony stumbled, at three miles an hour, up the last ascent of a seemingly unending series of ridges which he intended to climb that day. They had crossed the Sinko (which, later, people call the Orange) in the dawn, and the Semena had proved a nuisance about nine of the clock. Michael's pack-horse, an obstinate brute, had declined to follow the others through the one ford where the water was only middle-deep, and the river had swept him down for a jolly little swim that had meant a magnificently wet breakfast for Michael at ten. Ever since then they had been going up and down, each ascent leading to a skyline which only showed another beyond it. Nor had they seen a soul all day. Nor had the sun been hot enough thoroughly to dry the blankets in which

they must sleep that night. Nor was there anything for supper but the scant remains of a fortnight's provisions, consisting chiefly of a tin of sardines and some ancient bread, which could not be contemplated with pleasure. Besides, Michael was saddle-sore from a long trek, and the horses dead tired, and a day's ride on a tired horse is calculated to impair the temper of the best of missionaries. Michael, therefore, jogged his horse to the summit in a dull wonder as to why he had ever been ass enough to come to the Lesuto at all.

A last pull, and they were up—and Michael reined up for a moment with an exclamation of surprise. Across the little valley, with its spring of mountain water by which they would camp, was another skyline, and, as he topped his own, a man rode up to that other. It was not so far across that he could not see that the man was white, and even while he waited for his boy and his pack-horse to stumble up alongside, the other man's boy and pack joined him. Both parties quickened up for the descent, and in a quarter of an hour the Rev. Michael Carlile was shaking hands with the Rev. John Meredith of his own Mission.

They had met but once before, though their parishes adjoined, and that at the conference among the flesh-pots of the central station, with its several churches, and considerable European population, and quite imposing conventionalities. That they had met but once was not surprising, however, as Michael's parish exceeded 4,000 square miles, and John's ran a good second. But it seemed that both chanced to be travelling that day on the border, and that so they had met. And both were pleasantly surprised at the meeting.

The united forces soon had a camp comfortably arranged. The big fire flamed up, and Michael's inner man warmed still more on the discovery that his friend

was more recently from civilisation, and that it would not be necessary to fall back on sardines. While he saw to the drying of his blankets, Meredith spread a ground-sheet and divided his own sleeping equipment into two couches, whereon each man could stretch himself, and eat with the luxury of ancient Romans. Michael returned to view a feast—a soup of meat extract, a cold fowl and fried potatoes, new bread, butter and jam, and—incredible kindness of Providence!—half a box of dates! They washed it down with coffee, and lit their pipes while the moon came up over the crests in a glory of pure silver light.

There was nothing said, at first, that is of any interest here. They discussed the usual topics—their horses, their respective routes (with many barbarous names), and their past experiences of the trail. It was all such as you might have heard at a hundred African camp-fires that night. Then they said a little of religion, as might have been expected, and the talk died down. Both were tired. Carlile knocked out his pipe, and it sounded sharp and clear in the still night.

“Shall we have Mass to-morrow?” he asked.

“Yes, I think so,” said Meredith; “that flat stone will do well for an altar. Will you say it, or shall I?”

“I don’t mind,” said the other, “though as a matter of fact I’m horribly tired and I should be glad if you did.”

“I should very much like to, to-morrow,” said Meredith, “as it’s an anniversary with me. Do you mind if I say a votive mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus? I always feel that one can say votive masses more or less when one likes in the mountains, and I try to say one of the Sacred Heart every year on February the 5th.”

“Why, of course,” said Michael, “I don’t mind, but, if it isn’t obtruding, I should be interested to know why you keep the day in that way.”

The other did not answer for a moment, and Michael felt reproached.

"Oh! I shouldn't have asked," he said; "please don't mind not telling me."

Father Meredith raised himself on his arm and looked out over the valley. The stars shone clear and it was very still. He was the older man, and Michael regarded him a little curiously. He looked as if he wished to speak, but hardly knew how to frame the words. But a bit of *liso* fell in the fire with a slight noise, and at that triviality he looked over at Carlile.

"I'll tell you, if you like," he said slowly, "but to be frank, I don't know you well enough to be sure what you will make of it. It's a curious story, and will take a little time. Are you sure you care to hear?"

"Rather," said the younger man. Meredith had a bit of a reputation. He was thought the most devoted priest in the diocese, and he was unlike the rest in many ways. Not the least, he practised his religion with a single directness that was rather striking. Michael was keen, therefore, to hear what he had to say.

"I'll just fill my pipe again," he said, "if you don't mind."

"Not a bit," said the other, and then, "Do you believe in relics?"

Michael stopped pushing in the dry Transvaal leaves, and looked up expectantly. "Well..." he said, and hesitated. "Yes," he added.

Father Meredith smiled. "Not prepossessed against them, eh?" he said. "Well, I admit I was, up to four years ago, come to-morrow. I'd seen the Holy House, you know, and I can't abide the hideous trunks that disfigure the French altars under the name of reliquaries. But four years ago to-morrow I saw something which left me less critical, and I think a little more humble. It was this way."

And so Michael Carlile heard the story of our Lady's sorrow as he lay on a blanket away among the Malutis under the light of the moon.

"I had a friend in London some years back," said Father John, "who was one of those odd people whom you sometimes meet, a shrewd person enough, fairly well off, clever, very sympathetic to religion, but by no means a practising Catholic. He had a house down Chelsea way, a nice old place, in which he had stored a great collection of rare and strange things, many of them beautiful and a good few ecclesiastical. I always go to see him when I am in England, and he always shows me anything new that he has acquired since I was there last. Four years ago, on my last furlough, after I had been home for a month or so, I went up to Town to visit my tailor and do a little business, and towards six o'clock ran down to Chelsea for dinner. My friend was not expecting me, but I knew he was in Town, and he was the kind of man a Colonial can get on with, since he rather liked his friends to drop in entirely unexpectedly. Moreover, if he had been out, I should have gone on to the priest with whom I was staying.

"His man answered my knock, and showed me at once into my friend's sanctum. He was smoking in an armchair before a fire as I entered, but he jumped up at my name and came forward eagerly. I was struck at once with the fact that he was excited.

"'Meredith!' he exclaimed, 'by all that's odd. I had no idea you were in England or I should most certainly have asked you here to-night. Come in, my dear man. I'm delighted to see you. Benson, tell the cook Father Meredith will stay for dinner.'

"He gave me one of his excellent cigars, and forced me down into his own chair. He himself leaned on the

mantelpiece and watched me, and all the while that he courteously asked the usual questions I could see that something lay on his mind about which he burned to speak. So I said at last : ' Come along, Fenton ; out with it ; what's on your mind ? '

" He laughed at that and took two or three restless little marches up and down the room before he spoke. ' Yes,' he said, ' I suppose you can see that I'm especially interested in something, and the truth is, Meredith, that so I am, *very* interested. I've hit on something which is more extraordinary than anything else I've known in the whole course of my life, and I can't get rid of the sense of it. Here, take this. What do you make of it ? '

" As he spoke he hurried across the room, pulled open a drawer in his writing desk, and lifted something carefully out. He came back to me more quietly ; and put an object in my hands. It was a cross of black wood, heavy and solid, about two feet long and six inches thick."

Meredith paused a moment, and put his pipe down. He had been tranquilly smoking up till now. Then he leant a little forward and said quietly and evenly, but rather slowly :—

" Now, Carlile, you have got to take my word for what I say. I'm not a sentimentalist, and I don't know anything about psychology and all the rest of it, but I must tell you what happened when Fenton put that cross in my hands. I was sitting in my chair, you remember. Well, I had leaned forward to take the thing, and until that moment I had no idea at all what I was to see. Even then I did not know what I know now. But the moment that object lay in my hands, Fenton, the room, the thing itself, passed absolutely out of my mind. I don't mean to say that they faded away or anything like that ; only that

suddenly my mental senses were overpowered by something else. Do you know how sometimes a bit of music, or a picture, or, more often still, a scent, will recall some memory so strongly that present circumstances, for a second or two, almost disappear? Well, it was like that, only the sensation was far more powerful than anything I have ever experienced before. I forgot, absolutely, all my surroundings. I just sat, leaning forward, with that in my hands.

“ And that was not all. It was not mere forgetfulness of external things ; I was conscious of something else. How can I explain it? I was conscious of an overwhelming sense of desolation and sorrow, but not as if it were my own, only as if someone I loved was suffering, and I was a spectator of it. That sense *racked* me through and through. I found, when I looked up, that my eyes were full of tears.

“ But even *that* was not all. You have formed, doubtless, an explanation so far, in your mind, but I do not think you will expect this. I was also overwhelmingly conscious that the person whose suffering I felt was a woman. You may ask how that could possibly have been, and I cannot answer you ; I do not know. All I do know is that my sense was exactly that of standing by the side of a woman, at whom I was looking and whom I loved, and who was stabbed and torn with an emotion so terrible that it communicated itself to me in crushing desolation.

“ Then I heard Fenton speaking. ‘ You, too ! ’ he exclaimed. ‘ My God, why not I ? ’ And I looked up, as I have said.

“ There was a silence between us for a little. I still felt moved—I remember I was even trembling ; but the original sense had passed, and I could look at that cross without feeling it. But still I had not moved. Then I broke our silence by an effort, and

I think I said, 'What is it, Fenton, and where did you get it?'

" 'Look closer,' he said.

" I turned the thing over, and saw at once that it was a cleverly contrived box. There was a little spring, which I released, and at once a most beautiful silver reliquary, as I did not doubt, was exposed to view, itself a chased silver cross lying within the outer casket of wood. I took it out, and momentarily the sensation I have described returned to me. But it passed, and I saw that the silver cross also opened. I released that spring, and there lay in my hand an ivory and enamel cross, a few inches long only, a perfect gem of workmanship, it also a box. I was just about to open this latter cross when Fenton stopped me, and even as he did so I became aware that I had forgotten him again, and that I was slowly returning to that state which had come upon me so suddenly before. 'No,' said he, 'don't open that. Close them again, Father, and give them to me. I want to tell you the story. There is just time before dinner.'

" He spoke normally again, and I put the three together and returned him the cross. Then he sat down opposite me, and told me this history.

" 'A few weeks ago,' he said, 'I had nothing to do one afternoon, so I thought I would stroll down to Isaacson's, the old Jew at the corner of Beaufort Street, whom I had not seen for some months, and who often keeps things for me to see if I care for them. I reached his shop and found him apparently doing nothing as usual, and after we had greeted each other, I asked him if he had anything to show me.

" 'He said, "Yes," and produced a bit of Sheffield plate, for which I care nothing; an Egyptian ring, curious but not unlike several more I have; a Renaissance stole, which I bought to give to the

“Art and Book Co.” man, for whom I often pick up such things.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Well,” said I, “that’s not much, Isaacson. Can’t you better that ? ”

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ No, sir,” said he, and as he said it I knew he lied. He’s a nice old chap, Isaacson—to me, anyway—and looks you straight in the face as a rule, but as he said that, he kept his eyes on the case before him.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Isaacson,” said I, “you have. Out with it ! Why shouldn’t I see it, even if you can’t part with it ? ”

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ I won’t go on with our argument. It’s enough that he refused for a long time, but at length gave in.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Well, Mr. Fenton,” he said, “if you step round here you can see something, for I won’t touch it. I won’t sell it you, sir ; no, not for anything. So it’s no use your trying to buy it, but seeing as how we’ve done a bit together, you and I, you can see it, sir, for yourself ! ”

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Does it bite, Isaacson ? ” said I, laughing, and passed round the counter ; and there on a shelf at the back that looked as if it had been cleared for it, lay that cross. It was a curious thing to see in an old Jew’s shop, and more curious still to hear the old man speak like that. So I picked it up right away without a word.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Ah ! ” exclaimed old Isaacson. “ Do you feel nothing, sir ? ” “ Feel anything ? ” said I. “ Why of course I don’t, except old wood.” (Then I sprang the catch.) “ Why it’s a reliquary, and fine at that ! What, an ivory one inside, too ! What’s in that ? ”

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Don’t open that, sir ! ” exclaimed the old man.

“ ‘ ‘ ‘ Well, it was a bit foolish, I suppose ; but we stood and looked at each other behind the counter for a second or two without a word. Something in that old man’s face silenced me, but I was never more surprised in my life than when he said suddenly :

“““ There, sir, take it away. I won't sell it you, and I didn't mean to speak of it, but seeing as how you *feel nothing*, sir, take it away.”

“ ‘I couldn't move him to name a price, and he would say no more, neither how he had got it, nor what was inside that ivory cross, though I guessed what he thought was there. So I came away here, and opened the whole.

“ ‘Yes,’ said I, ‘and what is in it?’

“ ‘A thin slither of wood,’ replied Fenton slowly, ‘a mere splinter, black with age and very brittle.’

“ The clock ticked on without interruption for a good minute, and then he went on, for I would not speak :

“ ‘But I must tell you the rest. That night I took the case round to Father André, at the Servite Church—you know?’

“ I nodded. ‘Well, I gave it to him, just saying that it was a curious old reliquary that I had come across that afternoon; but the moment his hands closed on it, he looked as you did just now.’

“ ‘How did I look?’ said I.

“ ‘Never mind,’ said Fenton; ‘just listen a minute. When he looked up, I said to him: “Well, Father, what do you feel, for I can feel nothing”; and he answered me, as far as I can remember, in these words—remember he knew no more than you did.

“ ‘“I feel as if I had seen my mother with a breaking heart, and as if mine would break too.” Is that how you felt?’

“ I nodded; I could say nothing; and again the old clock held the field.

“ ‘Come,’ Fenton said suddenly, ‘I am forgetting we must dress for dinner and I've not finished. Have you heard of Mademoiselle Duville? Well, she is coming here to-night, after dinner, to hold that in her hands. A man I know, to whom I told the story,

suggested it, for I know nothing whatever of mediums and clairvoyants. But it appears that she was very famous once, and that now she is a good Catholic and won't ordinarily touch the subject; but he is bringing her. I've asked Father André too, though he doesn't know why, and I should have asked you if you were in England—and here you are! Now let's go and dress.'

"But at the door I stopped him. 'Fenton,' I said, 'did Father André say any more?'

" 'Why do you ask that?' he queried.

" 'Only curiosity' I said, 'Why?'

" 'Well' he said rather grimly, 'because he did say one other thing as we parted at the door in the Fulham Road. It was this: "I shall pray God, Mr. Fenton, than you may come to feel as I felt too."'

Meredith stopped for so long, that Carlile interrupted his silence. "Is that all?" he asked. "Nearly," said Meredith, "but I am sorry, for the climax is to come and it is getting late, only, somehow, I hardly dare speak of what follows; I will try to put it briefly."

"We dined, and talked of Africa rather constrainedly the while. There was a ring as Benson brought in the coffee, and he came back to say 'Father André, sir.' At that we went into the study, and I shook hands with a stout, quiet-looking clergyman whom I had met at Fenton's house before. We talked indifferently for a few minutes and then there was another ring, and we heard Benson go to the door.

" 'Father André,' said Fenton quickly at that, 'I have asked you here to-night, without your knowledge, to witness something. I hope you will forgive me. There are at the door now, I expect, a Dr. Paget, a friend of mine, and Mademoiselle Duville, a clairvoyante. She does not know for what particular purpose she is here, but I intend to put that reliquary in her hands. Please say nothing whatever to her first.'

“ Before he could reply, Benson ushered them in. I don't in the least know what Fenton meant to do, but I suppose he would have introduced us and then casually got on to the subject, but what followed happened so suddenly that even Benson was startled out of his usual calm, and did not so much as get out of the door before it was all over.

“ The doctor came in first, a middle-aged, clean-shaven, keen-looking man, an agnostic, I believe, and I was just wondering why he had preceded the lady, when I saw her. It appeared that she had refused to go first, indeed almost to enter at all, and the moment she was inside, as Fenton was beginning a conventional greeting, she seized Paget by the arm and cried out : ‘ I cannot stay in this room, Dr. Paget, take me out instantly ! ’

“ We had risen, André and I, and stood amazed, but at that Fenton, without hesitation, strode across the room, pulled open the drawer, and I heard a quick snap ! snap ! of catches. Then he turned and took a few paces forward, thrust something into the lady's hand, and said :

“ ‘ What is this, Mademoiselle ? ’

“ I could see it was the ivory cross.

“ And then the most tender and the most wonderful thing I have ever seen, or ever expect to see, occurred. The girl, for she was only a girl, sank on her knees before us and burst into tears, gasping between her sobs :

“ ‘ Oh, my God, my God ! His Mother ! His Mother ! . . . Oh, my God ; Oh, my God ! ’

Michael's breath, as he lay listening, caught in his throat with a little choking sound, but Meredith went steadily on now.

“ I don't know how it happened really, but André and I were on our knees when Mademoiselle Duville

spoke again as well as she could for tears. It was plain she was clairvoyante, but it was not like anything I should have imagined.

“ ‘We are on a hill,’ she said. ‘Why is it so dark? . . . I wish the crowd would keep still; I can’t see or hear properly. . . . Oh, don’t, don’t, don’t! Don’t look like that, Lady! What do you see? . . . Oh, my God, a cross, and—and— . . . oh! her face is white with pain! . . .’

“Then André got up swiftly and took it away, his lips set as he did so, and Mademoiselle Duville fainted away.”

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The South African night was all about those two on the mountains as Meredith finished, for the fire had died down to nothing and there was no sound to be heard. Then, far away, there arose that faint murmur that an African knows so well, the murmur which swells and swells into a sudden storm of wind and may pass as quickly and as mysteriously as it came.

“The wind is coming,” said Meredith, “we had better get into our blankets.”

They rose at that, and each man was busy for a little. Then, rolled there in their blankets, the wind swept down upon them, and screamed among the rocks, and bent the tall grasses which sighed as it passed, so that neither could sleep. And then, slowly, slowly, the tumult grew less, and the sighing of the grasses died down, and the faint moaning that followed passed itself at last, until the world slept again.

“Father Meredith,” said Michael.

“Yes,” said the priest.

“But why should you say a votive mass of the Sacred Heart on the 5th of February?”

“Well, you see, Fenton asked me to do so. It was on that date, about a month after the incident I have

told you, that he went as a Carthusian novice to St. Hugh's Carminster."

"Oh!" said Michael, "and the relic?"

"He took it with him," said Father Meredith.

"But why our Lady?" persisted the other.

"I do not know," said Father Meredith, "unless it had been her fragment."

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Carlile was up early although he was tired. It was he who set the small black cross and the two candles on the unhewn stone, and who spread the altar cloths over the little portable slab that lay on the rough surface. He knelt, too, to serve his friend, and heard while Father Meredith read of the wounds that were given in the House of Friends, and of the piercing of that spear on Calvary. And then, when the white Host was lifted in the One Sacrifice, he, too, raised his head, and looked beyond it to the green of the sloping hill-side, and the grey stones of the way, and the blue of the morning sky, and the radiance of the sun new-risen on a hundred peaks, but saw instead the narrow limits of a Carthusian cell, and wondered if Fenton had learnt his share yet in the sorrows of God and of His Mother.

CHAPTER III

THE CALL

I HAVE got leave to set this story, such as it is, upon paper, for otherwise I should not attempt it. There is a certain intimacy about it, and that in connection with the most delicate of all subjects, which would compel me to stay my hand if it were not for that leave. Indeed, even apart from the question of permission, I hesitated a little about the writing, for I have a great affection for my friend, and never remember his words without a sense of great peace taking possession of my heart. That is due, I doubt not, as well to the contact of his own quiet and simple personality as to the story itself. The story, therefore, may have a hard reception from the cold world, and I should be sorry for that. And yet—well, it is anciently writ that no record of God's word to a soul is void of power.

At least, I have the right to shepherd what I have to say, by trying to suggest the personality of him who has made the trivial incidents—chances I had almost written, but I will not affect what I do not believe—what they are to me. He is an elderly missionary. Some time back now, he was a considerable figure at a big University, a many-sided man—sportsman, ready speaker, *littérateur*—who made his mark. When he crowned his undergraduate years with a brilliant degree and was finally given Holy Orders, his friends all said of him that he would go very far. I doubt not but that he has ; but not as his friends thought. He is a missionary in the Lesuto, with a church that seats less than 200 souls, and a parish hidden away out of the

run of even diocesan events, and hard and unresponsive at that. He is in what you would call a backwater, and he knows it ; but he is entirely serene and simply happy, and very far indeed from being a back number himself. He cannot, it is true, keep exactly in touch with the movements of modern thought and life, for half his stipend goes into his parish, and it would not buy many books at best, while a library or the use of another's purchases is out of the question. Some considerably worn and second-hand copy of the book of the year that we have all discussed, does usually reach him about five years late, and it is a little pathetic to find him so eager over something we have almost forgotten. And yet I have noticed that he invariably has something to say about it that occurred to no one else at the time.

To reach his station, then, you must go through an incredibly back-veld *dorp*, whose railway station is six miles from the houses which cluster round an unnecessarily huge and proportionately ugly Dutch Reformed church, not yet out of debt. There you get on a horse and enter Basutoland after a while, at a place where reasonable roads north may be said to end. But you go north. Presently you leave even an unreasonable road, and again even that, and take to the native veld. Before you, at that moment, lies *Tulo ea Khotso*, a big cluster of trees on a hillside that is itself a spur of a towering and magnificent amphitheatre of mountains and rocks in the central range itself. There are no such trees for miles, as the birds know well. They greet you as you ride past the little Calvary at the entrance and up the double avenue of oaks. There is a perpetual melody of innumerable doves ; there is a heronry across a field where the orchard slopes down to high blue gums and gigantic willows ; and by the house itself is a rookery disputed by a host of migratory hawks year by year. The tiny humble church is to the

left, with thick stone walls and lancet windows, and low altar unscreened and unrailed, so that it might be some ancient East Anglian anchorage; and to reach the house, you pass through a rickety wooden gate that is apparently not meant to shut, into a garden that seems, at first sight, one wilderness of tangled rose trees ablaze with colour. It has a stoep, on which we were sitting in the afternoon shade when my friend told me his story. Before the stoep is a square patch where the hardiest flowers—phlox, petunia, zinnia, marigolds and portulaca—riot in a glory. Beyond that again, is the orchard; and past a walnut and an old apricot one reaches “the study.”

When first I saw it I knew at once that it was the place of my dreams. Great tangled brakes of wild brier enclose an open space, in the centre of which is an old stone well, long disused. Willows whisper above it and hang down green streamers almost to the grass. To the right is a small thatched shelter of rough stone, walled on three sides, and open as to the fourth, so that he who sits within at the rough table (and there is no other furniture than a rude hanging bookshelf and a chair), looks across the open circle and the well to where a crucifix, about eight feet high, stands silently. Before it is a prie-dieu fixed in the ground, of such a height that a man may lean his arms upon it. To the right, a little path wanders off among the trees, and makes a sudden turn, after fifty yards or so, by a great clump of pines. Just there, in a simple wooden shrine, stands a white statue of the Mother, and, when I saw it first, a clump of the big blue African lily was in full bloom at her feet. Past the shrine you go, and back a little on your way, till the path ends at a sudden break in the trees. From the gap one looks across the veld to the mountains—across village after village where, for the most part, men do not know

either the Son's perpetual sacrifice or the Mother's endless prayer. The grass, even, is worn away there, where a man may stand and gaze, and pray.

It was not, therefore, that *Tulo ea Khotso* lacked in beauty: indeed it might well have attracted a poet, a dreamer, a hermit saint; but my friend was, if something of all these, a good deal more besides. He was made for a bishopric. He would have governed well—inspired, designed, completed. His was an acute mind, eager for conversation and for the exchange of ideas, and it was also the mind of a master of men. Here, then, all these things were denied him. His little flock, despite all his care, was drunken and unimaginative. Beauty in religion, and, still less, wisdom, made little appeal to them. Nor was there a white man near for a companion, nor a city, nor, as I have said, even a library. And yet my friend struck one always as the contented, occupied man who has found his vocation.

This, then, was what I tried to say to him as we sat the fourth afternoon on the stoep. We had been to see a local chief who was making himself a particular nuisance at the time, and we had found him swinishly drunk. My friend had been incredibly patient, it seemed to me; but I could tell that he was sad at heart. So on the stoep I ventured to suggest a change.

"Why don't you come home to England?" I said. "You have been out here long enough, and we want—without flattery—men like you at home. You ought to be vicar of a big city church, or, better still, the principal of a theological college, and here you are, wasted on Africa."

"That's what you think," said my friend.

"But you are not, in a sense, satisfied?" I questioned.

"I don't see what that has to do with it," he said.

"But," I urged, "everyone agrees with me who knows you."

"Do they?" he answered, placidly.

"But, good heavens! man," I said, almost angrily, "you ought to think about others and the wider interests of the Church."

"Ought I?" he said. "As to the latter, at least I don't think it is I who should do the worrying."

"Well," I said, "if the Bishop won't make a move——"

"I wasn't thinking of the Bishop," he interrupted.

"Whom, then?" I asked.

"God," said he, looking straight at me.

We sat so for a minute or two, and then he sighed and looked away, shifting in his chair and crossing his legs.

"Look here, Wilfrid," he said, "I'll tell you my story. You may not agree with me, but at least you won't think it rubbish. And you will see why I believe God sent me here and why I do right to stay here till God sends me on."

So I listened, while the afternoon shadows lengthened among the rose bushes.

"When I left my theological college," said my friend, "I was in a very perturbed state of mind. To speak honestly, I did not want to be a priest at all; I wanted to be a politician and an author. I had, however, a fairly defined ambition that, if I were ordained, I would certainly be the author as well, and, maybe, in the long run, a good deal of the other. I was fool enough" (and he smiled reminiscently) "to listen to my friends, and I thought I might get a seat in the Upper if not in the Lower House one day."

"It was not that I was not religious; I was; only, if anything, that made things worse. I almost hated

the Church of England. I was not by any means exactly like Dostoviesky's inquisitor who would better the Christ-plan, but, still, I thought things had changed since the first century, and that what we wanted was policy and authority. That was why I hated the Church of England; it seemed to me to have neither. I suppose I was a zealot, and the Church of England is a bad place for zealots—or used to be. Of course, I was young, too, and dreamed dreams.

“In this temper, then, I got a curacy in a big northern town, where there was plenty of ‘scope,’ and a keen, modern, but spiritual vicar. The one disadvantage was that it lay in the bishopric of Hexham, where the Bishop was an Early Victorian broad-churchman and everything to do with him was laid on the same lines. I did not think much about that, however, and I went. And the first crisis came at the ordination.

“You, Wilfrid, will hardly credit that ordination. Good heavens, through what has not Almighty God brought the Church of England! I shan't tell you all about it, only little things: how we were allowed to go to any inn in the village to put up; how I found my first confrère in the smoke-room, his legs on the mantelshelf, a glass of whisky by his side, and a cram copy of Old Testament History in his hand; how we dined the first night of our ‘Retreat’ with my lord, in evening dress, and were entertained in the drawing-room afterwards by some delightful ladies and some amateur alfresco conjuring; how the services were deadly, deadly dull; how every conceivable bit of business was muddled; and how finally a powerful dignitary descended upon us from London with an address the night before the ordination Sunday, which denied the Resurrection of our Lord as the Apostles believed in it, and bristled with ridicule of the Catholic Church. But that's what happened. And after that

address I flung away into the fields under the stars alone ; I prayed under a hedge with tears ; I tired myself ; I despaired ; I proposed leaving at once for—if you must know—a Jesuit monastery. Then, as I walked home, an idea came to me. You may think it foolish, but the truth is that I had, at my inn, a tiny text-book, given me as a boy at my confirmation years before, in which I often found much comfort. It was a very simple thing, and you would have thought that I should have given it up, since it was most dreadfully Protestant, and the texts had no relation to the Christian Year or anything of that sort. But I hadn't. I kept it. I glanced in it occasionally, and—and this is what you may think foolish—I often found that the disjointed, unconnected texts seemed to have a strange significance for me. Anyway, as I walked back close on midnight that evening, almost broken-hearted, certainly in despair, it came into my mind that I would try the *sortes* of that little book. If it had no message, I would go ; if it had a message, I would abide by it. I quickened my pace. I almost ran through the cottages on the outskirts of the little town, And in a minute, on my knees by my bedside, I was staring at these texts for the evening of that date—

“ ‘ *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.* ’ ”

“ ‘ *Peace, be still.* ’ ”

“ So I was ‘ still,’ and I even had peace next day. . . . ”

“ Well, off I went to my curacy ; and I think it isn't foolishness to say that I got on rather well. It amused and inspired me to find that, even as a deacon, I was getting an engagement book full of sermon bookings, and some quite big ones. I was elected to this and that committee ; I had a good deal to do in the planning of a very successful mission for the whole city ; I made time for reading ; I was on a library committee ; I had a book on the stocks. Don't think I was

merely ambitious ; I wasn't ; I had a big slum district, and I did not neglect it. But—well, you can see the sort of man I was when I tell you what happened.

“ One morning I came down to breakfast, and was taken absolutely by surprise to find an episcopal letter on the table, asking me, in a dozen lines, to come out to the Lesuto. It struck me all of a heap. I had always been keen on Missions ; I had even thought I might quite possibly go abroad one day ; I had always said as much (that was why, I believe, my name had got round to the Bishop) ; but to clear clean off to a remote corner of Africa—I—just when things were opening up so splendidly. . . . I tell you, Wilfrid, I paced up and down by my untouched breakfast for half an hour, in a tumult.

“ And then I pulled myself together. Inwardly I knew I had already determined not to go, but I said to myself that I ought to pray about it. So I went over to my prie-dieu in the corner of my little sitting-room and knelt mechanically down. There was a prayer book open on it, open at the collect for the day, but I did not so much as notice it ; I just knelt in silence. But as I knelt, my mind cleared. I saw perfectly plainly that I was playing the coward, and that I must find out and do GOD's will in the matter. I had to wrestle to get even that plain ; but I succeeded so far at last. Then I grew rather afraid, but determined not to do either thing on my own choice only. And then, at an end, I opened my eyes, and my glance dropped down. I read mechanically, but, as I read, the words burned themselves into my brain.

“ *“O Almighty GOD, Who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men ; Grant unto Thy people that they may love the thing that Thou commandest, and desire that which Thou doest promise ; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world*

our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found ; through JESUS Christ our Lord. Amen.'

" You may hardly see the points as I saw them, but I wired to the Bishop that day.

" Well, I'm boring you, but it's almost over. I came out in a month or two with (such is my nature) considerable elation. I had had a big send-off, and I rather thought I was doing a fine thing. There's a glamour, you know, even about the cross—until you actually shoulder it, and then, if there is any glamour at all, it is only other people who see it. Anyway, I came out. I met my Bishop in Cape Town, and he was very kind, and I was pleased to find so much going on, and a distinct sense of bigness about things. I remember I determined, really, on my first curacy because of the fact that I arrived in the town on a Saturday night and was agreeably struck with the crowds of the people in the streets. There were enough, I thought, to make even a martyrdom worth while. (You see how sly the Devil is, Wilfrid !) Well, it was the same at Cape Town. I stayed a week, and I set off up-country really keen.

" I shall never forget that journey. We seemed to get farther and farther away from everything. That *dorp* you came through—heavens ! I had to wait there three hours for a horse, and I thought to myself, if this is my nearest town—— ! And then when I got among the people, after the first pleasure at the scenery had worn off, and so on, I was miserable. All the old tribal colour had gone. This was no conquest worth the making. These hideously dressed women, and civilised drunken men, were about as far removed from my interior and secret picture (drawn chiefly from Rider Haggard's novels) as they could be. And my feelings came to a head after the first Sunday. I was told it was a big congregation—and I could have counted the

men on my fingers ! And the singing, and the disorder and the slovenliness—I was overwhelmed by it all.

“ That evening, then, I crept into the church like a beaten man. I had that very morning reserved the Blessed Sacrament in the little Tabernacle, but I knelt before our Lord so oppressed that I could scarcely pray. Probably it was largely physical, but I felt as if I could not stay ; as if I had no welcome ; as if I were all alone ; as if the burden were too great for me. And then, as I knelt, a strange sense of the Presence came over me. It was almost as if some mighty, irresistible sea flooded slowly about me in waves of sensible silence, while I sank down, beaten, before it. The bitter-sweet of that Presence was too much for me. I think, as I knelt in the half-dark, that I was afraid to move, and yet, in my fear, I felt as if there was somehow a message for me. To pull myself together I began to read my Evensong—the catechist had said it before, and I had understood nothing in Sesuto—but I scarcely noticed what I read, until, at the end of the second Lesson, a verse leaped out at me like the Voice of GOD : ‘ *I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit ; but the Hand of the Lord was strong upon me.* ’ ”

There was silence a minute, and then my friend said : “ That was twenty years ago, now, and I think that I shall stay until GOD bids me go. The Bishop suggested moving me once, but he said he did it of himself to give me the chance. I had no voice at all from GOD ; so I stayed. And—well, I have peace.”

As I said, association with the personality of my friend may make the story what it is to me—a very tender and delicate thing. It would be false, I suppose, to argue that we should all govern ourselves by such possible indications of GOD’s will, although perhaps the turmoil and stress in which many of us live tend to

hinder what ought to be our reading of His ordering of little things, without Whom not one sparrow falls to the ground. I do not know. But—so strange is the power of sound—the cooing of many doves is not for me a melancholy thing, but instead it has power to conjure up the memory of that quiet and hidden sanctuary where my friend awaits so tranquilly the Will of the Father.

CHAPTER IV

JONATHAN HAYNES

No doubt, strictly speaking, there is no story at all in the matters about to be related. I should feel, indeed, a certain reticence in relating them if it were not for the effect they produced upon the mind of the Rev. Jonathan Haynes. His was not a particularly striking mind, it is true—only the mind of a commonplace simple person, who did his work obediently and methodically, but with a singular absence of success or enthusiasm. In consequence, perhaps, the chief departure of Haynes from the ordinary was into the depressed. He would sit on his stoep at nights, and listen to the crickets in the trees, and reflect that he was a failure, and his work with him. Then he would steel himself, in a commonplace way, with a reflection that the Catholic Church had existed before him and would exist after him ; that his business was not necessarily to succeed, but to go on with what was given him to do ; and that if his labours did not evangelize the nation, at least he put stones in the road along which someone else might tread to its evangelization in the future. It must be admitted that such thoughts, however correct, were not inspiring. Hence there may be some value in a series of incidents which led him for once. “ to start a wing ” and thank God and take courage.

The three incidents occurred within twenty-four hours. Haynes had under his care a huge tract of mountainous country somewhere south of the Zambesi, a trying land of rivers often impassable in the rains ;

of steep rocky paths climbable only to the rough mountain ponies ; of difficult dongas which took a weary time to negotiate ; of plains, beautiful as all the rest, but apt to grow monotonous when one had to jog across them at five miles an hour for six or seven hours on end. The district was fairly well populated however. You might ride a day without seeing much, but the big villages were hidden away on the spurs of the hills, and the huts were scattered fairly regularly where there were no villages. Haynes had the usual complement of out-stations to work. He used to figure on a fortnightly visit as far as possible, when he would arrive overnight and say Night Prayers ; offer the Holy Sacrifice, after Confessions as a rule, in the morning ; instruct catechumens ; visit the school, and return. He had enjoyed it at first, but in five or six years he had covered the same ground rather frequently. Consequently he contemplated drearily, during three extra minutes in bed, the fact that he had to leave for a mountain station, six hours away, on the particular morning in question.

His meditations were cut short by a knock on his door. " Come in," he said. Augustino, his boy, entered. " A messenger has come from Mapenzi's village, father," he said, " and old Samuel is dying. They say, wilt thou take the Sacraments to him as soon as thou canst."

Now Haynes' subsequent reflections and actions were characteristic of him. In the first place he was distinctly annoyed—almost, even, with old Samuel. This all meant at least an hour and a-half added to his proposed trek, and it involved haste and inconvenience as well. At the same time he might easily have put off the longer journey in consequence of the shorter, or he might have served Samuel sufficiently by eating his breakfast quietly at home, and then taking the Oil and

the Reserved Sacrament out of the Church. On the contrary, however, but protesting and without any enthusiasm whatever, as usual, he got up, dressed hastily, and rode off at once. He proposed, not merely to communicate the sick man, but also to say Mass in his room. Old Samuel had been a pious person, and Haynes thought he might like it, if he were conscious. If he were too sick for the service, then Haynes resolved to celebrate in the next hut. It would be good for the place, he thought.

So he rode off in the early morning, one big grumble interiorly, which was profoundly wrong of him, but interesting, as it shows how little he expected anything in the nature of vision. But perhaps it will be better to leave psychological reflections to those who are capable of making them. They can conclude precisely what they please.

Old Samuel lived in one of eight huts set on a ridge which ran on towards a big hill and itself separated a couple of valleys with their attendant streams. It was about 8 a.m. when Haynes rode up, and three naked children sprawling in the dust, an energetic hen, and a couple of lazy pigs greeted him. He off-saddled before anyone came; then a tall native in a preposterous assortment of European clothes emerged from the hut. He looked at Haynes inquiringly, but Haynes shook his head and said he had come to say Mass in the presence of the sick man if he were able to bear it. The young man said that he thought that his father would like it, and Haynes stooped and entered. In the hut were four old women, one of them Samuel's wife, a younger woman, the latest catechumen, and a good half dozen children, Haynes greeted them collectively and turned to the corner. It was rather dark after the sun outside, but he made out a pile of blankets, and a head appearing from a kaross, and he went across to it. The old,

wrinkled face looked at him with bright, fevered eyes. and lighted up as it recognised him. Haynes bent over him, strangely tender.

“ They sent for me, and I came at once,” he said. “ Are you in pain, Samuel ? ”

The old eyes gazed at him as if uncomprehendingly.

“ I have brought the holy Oil, Samuel,” went on the priest, “ for you know you will be going to see our Lord soon, and I must prepare you for your journey. And I wondered if you would like me to say Mass here, so that you might hear it again before you go. Would you ? ” This time the head nodded once vigorously ; but there was nothing said.

“ I am glad, Samuel,” said Haynes ; “ but first there is one thing you should try to do. You know that before we receive our Lord we should make our heart clean for Him. Would you not like——”

“ Confession,” interrupted the old man, eagerly,

Haynes sat back and looked round. For the first time he noticed the old soap-box covered with a white handkerchief, the two candles stuck to the lids of old tins, and the Crucifix hung on the wall behind. The careful preparation moved him somehow. “ Will you all go out,” he said, “ while I hear Samuel’s confession ? ”

The children hastily, the women ponderously, left him, while he unstrapped his roll and put on cotta and stole. He bent over Samuel. The old man was weaker he thought. “ I will say the Confession for you,” he said gently, “ and then you can try to tell your sins as slowly as you like.” The old face nodded again. “ I confess to Almighty God” began Haynes carefully. . . .

He called the others in while he was making ready for Unction and the Mass ; and after the psalm and the prayer, it seemed to him that it was in a strange stillness that he approached the pile of blankets with

the Oil. Firmly, with wet thumb, he pressed back the eyelids and anointed the old eyes. "By this anointing, and His most loving mercy, the Lord forgive thee all that thou hast sinned by sight." Haynes noticed the tears in them as they opened again. Then the rest—the gnarled, old hands and the hard feet, already cold, especially. Haynes remarked that he must make haste.

He was at the rude altar now. Quickly but reverently he pronounced the words, and at last bent himself for the Sanctus. The sound of a sheep-bell startled him : he had not thought that they would remember that. He straightened himself, and began the Canon. In the stillness a quavering voice broke the silence, and they all took it up. They were singing, "Blessed is He that cometh," as at a service in church, and without instruction. Haynes was strangely moved again.

The bell rang out once more, and again came the surprise. "O Lamb of God...." that quavering voice began. Could it possibly be Samuel? But surely he had not the strength! Haynes wished he could turn to see.

But in a few minutes the opportunity came as he turned with the Sacrament, and he was amazed by what he saw. The old man was sitting up in bed, his eyes glistening, his arms outstretched. Haynes moved quickly towards him, and sank to his knees. "The Body of our Lord JESUS Christ which was given for thee," he said, in the musical Sesuto....

Then the Cup ; and the old man sank back with those bright eyes closed and a smile on his face. Haynes returned to the altar, and the drama moved to its close. At the Benediction his eyes wandered against his will to that corner, and he saw a movement as the toil-worn hand moved in the sign of the Cross. It failed, he thought, to complete it, as he turned back to the altar.

During the last Gospel he heard a movement behind him, and as soon as he could, he turned again to see. From where he stood he could see that there was no need to go again to the corner. Old Samuel was not there. . . .

About 11 a.m. Haynes got into the saddle for his long ride. He had arranged for the native priest to be called for the funeral, and there was nothing more for him to do. They all came out to see him off, and he rode slowly away. He had no one to talk to for six hours, and it proved a trying ride. The sun was unusually fierce, and the way rougher from Mapenzi's than it would have been from the centre station. Three times he had the lamentable business of climbing painfully up and up a rocky valley and over a bleak crest, only to find another long ascent before him ; and when at last he dropped down on Ledinmane he was as tired as a man could be. They gave him a hut, however, and he got out his bread and a tin of sardines and sat down to that and his kettle of tea, content with the food and the rest if only he might be left alone. But that was not to be. He had not finished his last cup when the catechist appeared. It was a penitent ; he had come very far over the mountains, and as the Father was celebrating among the people an hour farther on in the morning, he begged to be shriven that night, there and then.

Haynes looked at his pipe wistfully and at his roll with some despair, but he was priest enough to give a gruff assent. It was a perfunctory business altogether, partly because the man was very ignorant, and partly because Haynes was extremely tired ; but it was over at last. The man got up slowly and departed with a little limp, and Haynes, with a sigh, pulled his cotta over his head. Ridiculously, he stopped with it on his arms, staring at something on the floor. Then

he bent to see. He was right. It was a half-footprint marked in blood. There were three others, altogether, on the way to the door. The man had indeed come far.

It is a changeable climate, and next morning it was cold enough to freeze the marrow in one's bones. After all, the hut was at least 7,000 feet high in the mountains, and it was early winter, but neither reflection helped Haynes at all. It was too cold to wash much, especially as he had to be in the saddle with the early dawn for an hour's ride to the place of the Station ; and he put on his clothes over his pyjamas, and his coat and a blanket over them, in a vain attempt to keep warm. The wind blew fiercely in his face, and the ground was pocketed with snow. The path was not level for a hundred yards, and the ponies had to pick their way over slippery stones in the streams and up the frozen earth-trails like so many cats. The catechist rode ahead, and Haynes tied his reins to his coat, and put his hands in his pockets to keep out the cold. His horse could only walk, and besides he did not much care at that moment what happened. Half-way there, however, he woke up to some sort of interest, because from his high station he could see all the valley, and he noticed moving specks of red blankets and black coats dotted here and there about it. He and his companion reached the village at last, however, and then came the heart-breaking wait on an empty stomach while the congregation arrived. Finally, nevertheless, he could begin the preparation with the communicants, and then it angered him to find that they had forgotten the simple prayers he had taught them on his last visit. He reflected, however, that that had been over a month ago, and kept silent. But on his way to the door, he got another sense of shock. Kneeling there was old Marta. Now Marta was as stupid as a native of seventy converted at

sixty-five can be, and that is saying a great deal. Haynes had always half thought that he had done wrong to have her confirmed; for instance, on his last visit only, she had actually broken down in the Lord's Prayer. He determined to tell her not to receive that day. Then he changed his mind again. He would make an address at the Offertory, and yet another short one just before the Canon, and then his responsibility would end. But he was in a poor frame of mind as he went to the Altar.

He grew worse as things went on. The singing was incredibly awful. There was a woman at the back somewhere with an unbelievable voice who would sing loudly and persistently. It was literally "awful"; Haynes felt that he could not endure it to the end. Fortunately, as his endurance was at the breaking-point, the opening hymn concluded, and he began.

At the Offertory he noticed that old Marta had come right up to the front. Perhaps it was that that made him speak so coldly and judicially. Anyway, the upturned blank faces gazed at him stonily from where their owners sat or crouched on the mud floor. It was not a successful sermon.

But the collection finished it. He had drummed into his people the value of making some offering to God when they received the great Gift from God, until he was tired, and then that day they handed him the bag with one "tikki" in it.... He set himself to go on in a kind of despair.

Right up to the beginning of the Canon he was in two minds as to whether he should (horribly unorthodoxically) say anything, or whether he should leave them alone; but the sight of Marta, as he said the Comfortable Words, decided him. She really was too ignorant; he must impress upon her what was to happen. So he turned, after the Benedictus, for a word or two.

They were never spoken. As he turned he saw that old Marta had changed her position yet once more. She was stretched at full length on the ground ; her black and wrinkled hands were held out and working convulsively within a few inches of the edge of his alb, and the tears were streaming down her face. Her lips were working too. Then he caught her prayer. " JESUS—JESUS—JESUS "—she was saying ; that was all. The crude oleograph on the wall behind the mud altar looked all blurred to him as he turned back without a word.

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Somehow or another the sum-total of the three incidents did not strike Haynes till he got back home. He was alone at supper, but his boy noticed nothing until he brought in the cheese. Then he saw that his master had put down his knife and was sitting back from the table, his hands on the edge of it, staring hard at nothing. He did not touch the cheese either. Instead he rose suddenly and went into church. There he knelt before the Tabernacle for a long time in silence ; and thanked God and took courage, as I have said.

CHAPTER V

CATTLE MONEY

SEKEKE had been walking since daybreak, and he was mightily tired. He had come from the camp by a path that would never run straight, but travelled up and down, over hills and down to streams, as it pleased. An hour ago, however, he had reached the worst part, for, striking the Caledon river as a tiny stream a foot broad, he had just followed it to the spring where it rose, and then pushed straight on up the mighty pass, through the two great hummocks of rock, each five hundred feet high, that seem to guard it, and had now come out on the flat plateau above. It was a wonderful view, though Sekeke hardly appreciated it. Due west, endless jagged peaks pushed up into the clear sky, and one seemed to be above them all; due east, there was a rapid fall of thousands of feet, a sheer drop in places, to the Free State. Sekeke had to follow the little footpath that led down. He would sleep in a cave that night, and by chance at a store after that. The third day he would come to the *dorp*, and five miles beyond the *dorp* lay the farm to which he was journeying. Despite all that, though he could not see the farm, it looked as if you could throw a stone into the *dorp* itself from where he sat.

He took off the old deer-stalker which he had got at about half as much again as its original value from a Jew in Kimberley, and wiped it carefully with a red handkerchief. Then he drew a small purse of very poor leather (5s. at the store—1s. in England, only no one would buy them there) from his pocket, and

counted out slowly one, two, three, . . . ten pounds. Certain that they were safe, he counted them all back again and put the purse once more into his pocket, and then, and only then, did he take out his breakfast, some mealie bread and a piece of dried cooked mutton, washed down by a drink from the stream at his feet. What could a man want more? And since he was a catechumen, he made the sign of the Cross before he ate.

Sekeke's affairs, from being extremely simple, had grown profoundly complicated about a year before. He had been born in Kimberley, but had long since lost track of any near relations, and had drifted on to that Free State farm far below as little more than a boy. His life really began there. He had never been properly taken on, and he was not properly paid; but he did odd jobs, and shared a corner of a hut on the location, and got his skoff and occasional pay from the farmer, and was happy. Occasionally his master threw him an old shirt in lieu of a month's pay, and occasionally, in very good times, gave him a sheep or two, and once even a skinny heifer which appeared to be about to die. But it did not die; Sekeke nursed it a great deal better than he would have nursed himself. Also he sold his sheep and kept his shillings, and bought cattle as he could, until, a year ago, he had had five beasts that ran with the herd of a Mosuto headman in return for the milk of the two cows among them.

Sekeke had not collected beasts for nothing. In the location was a girl, young, tall, well developed, whom Sekeke loved. He had visions sometimes, as he lay wrapped in his blanket at the end of the day, of Agnesi nursing his baby or bringing the mealies in from his fields. Of course, as yet he had neither, but that was where the cows came in. Agnesi's father had promised her to him for five beasts and five sheep,

and his friend the headman had promised the corner of a field and the place for a hut and five sheep as soon as the girl was his. It sounds a bit complicated, but it was not so to Sekeke. He had only to persuade the headman to give him the five sheep first, and the thing was done. To that end, a year ago, he had begged a week's holiday from his master and set out for the hills via the location.

First, however, a word about Agnesi. She was a Christian, and of her family none other except Gabrieli, aged six. Her grandfather, however, was a catechumen, and her mother, since dead, had also been baptised. Her father went to the Mission service on Sundays sometimes, and he knew what he ought to do at heart, only he didn't do it. It was Agnesi who had brought Sekeke to church; but Sekeke had asked for baptism of his own accord. Father Mark had signed him, and undertaken his instruction, and he had got something into the boy's head, but not much as yet; not enough, anyway, to prevent what happened when Sekeke came to the location on his way to the hills.

It was not all Sekeke's fault, though, of course, he was guilty. Anyway, there had been a drinking, and Sekeke, excited with the prosperity of his affairs, had gone to it. Then there had been a quarrel and a fight, with disastrous consequences, and Sekeke had been arrested among others. There was enough to show that he had been of the party, but not enough to secure a big conviction. He got £10 or two years, and was lucky at that.

In his distress Sekeke turned first to Father Mark. He presented himself, shamefacedly, and tried to borrow £10. The Father simply had not got £10 to lend him, and he was obliged to send him sorrowfully away, and after that Sekeke returned to the farm and tried the farmer. Yes, he would lend him £10—on the

security of the five beasts. It sounded all right, and the beasts were driven in and the fine paid. But what of Agnesi? Memories of Kimberley helped him out. He would go there, earn his money in the mines, redeem his cattle, marry his girl, and be happy yet! Such is the simplicity of the negro that it seemed accomplished when he and she went to the priest for a blessing on the eve of his setting out. Father Mark smiled on them, read a bit of sound advice to Sekeke, hung a medal round his neck, and sent him out.

All this had been a year ago. Sekeke was on his way now to redeem the cattle. He did not know anything about it, but he was a kind of Jacob. And his troubles were to come.

Three days after Sekeke had climbed that pass he came up to the farm beyond the *dorp*. The veld was rather dry and the sun pretty hot, and the farmer a little annoyed because the ploughing was a slow business. Sekeke found him on the big field by the spruit, and swung off his hat, all smiles.

"Morro, baas," he said.

"Morro," growled the farmer, without recognising him.

Sekeke waited, still smiling. Presently he sat down, still smiling. He was in no particular hurry; the white man would attend to him when he was ready, and besides he recognised two of the oxen in the team.

But at the next furrow he was in the way, and the vials of the white man's wrath were poured out.

"What the devil do you want, you black nigger, you. Get out of the way, confound you!" he yelled.

"Right, baas," said Sekeke, and then (still smiling), "I think baas forget I."

"Who are you?" asked the farmer.

"I Sekeke," said our hero, grinning all over his face. "I come from Kimberley, baas, for my oxen."

"Ho, you're Sekeke, are you?" said the farmer. "Oh, I can see you are now, you black scoundrel. Been killing any more men?"

"No, baas," said Sekeke, as if it were the best joke in the world, "but I want my oxen."

"Your oxen?" said the farmer. "Confound you; but where's my £10? You've not got that, anyway, and you can't have your beasts till then."

It was the moment of Sekeke's triumph, longed for during a year of servitude, and it was very sweet. Out came the cheap purse, and out the ten sovereigns.

"Here is the £10, baas," said he. "Now I have my oxen."

The white man counted them heavily. He was extremely annoyed, as he had reckoned on the beasts, which were worth a great deal more than £10, and his mind was working quickly. Suddenly he saw light.

"What's this for?" he asked with a leer.

"My oxen, baas," said poor Sekeke, with a horrible fear at his heart, puzzled though he was, for it seemed straight enough to him. "You lend me £10 for my oxen, and said I get my oxen back when I bring de money to baas," he stammered, losing his grammar every minute.

"You black scoundrel," roared the farmer, assuming anger to cover the injustice, "and what about the food your beasts have been eating all this year? Who is to pay for that? Five pounds at least they've eaten this year. I'll have another fiver, or you don't touch one."

"Fiver, baas? I not got any more," stammered poor Sekeke.

"Well, then, what you come worrying me for? Get out of it, you —— nigger. Get off my farm, or I'll put the police on you. Do you hear? Get off."

"But my ten pounds, baas—give me," said Sekeke.

“ Oh, no, you don't, my beauty,” answered the farmer, slipping them into his pocket. “ You owe me these. Go and get another five, and then you'll get your oxen. Do you hear ? Go ! ”

The world had never been quite so black to Sekeke before as he plodded back to the location. He was hard at work on a problem which puzzles the understanding of several million black men in South Africa, the problem of the white man's justice and the white man's logic. Sekeke was much too well tamed to think of revenge or the law, even if he could have got it ; no, it seemed to him that he was up against the blackest, most iron fate, and that the sun had ceased to shine in the sky. So he came into the location on leaden feet, and even the deer-stalker had lost its glory. Agnesi therefore saw him before he saw her. She was grinding, in her old blanket, and she promptly ran inside the reed fence and put on her new one. Then she came to greet him, as carelessly as only a native girl can.

“ Hullo, Sekeke,” she said (or something like it in Sesuto). “ Hast thou returned ? ”

“ Yes,” said Sekeke, and was silent.

“ And what is the news of the great town,” she asked, a little surprised at his tone.

“ Good,” said he, and sat down on a log.

“ Oh,” said she, and went over to her grinding of meal without a word more.

But it was more than human nature could bear. She glanced at him sideways. “ Thou hast new clothes,” said she.

“ Have I ? ” said he, and then, fumbling in a side pocket, he drew out a parcel wrapped in newspaper, and from it two hat-pins representing big swallows in amazing flight. “ This is for thee,” he said.

Agnesi had never worn a hat in her life, and could not pin one on if she tried ; but she was overjoyed.

"Tanki, tanki, very much," she said, and pinned them into her blanket, and then, pride worn down, she came over to him. "Hast thou the ten pounds?" she asked.

"Come and walk," he said, and got up, and told his tale as they went. Father Mark found them behind his fence, she sobbing, he stretched sullenly on the ground, ten feet away.

Now this is not the story of Father Mark, and so we are not concerned with what he said. It was he, however, who suggested a visit to the church, before he rode off, with wrath in his heart, to a fruitless interview with the farmer, by whom he was magnificently and gratuitously insulted. And in church Agnesi had her inspiration.

They were kneeling together at the back, and our Lady's picture hung above them. Agnesi noticed it. She looked at it fixedly, and she remembered some of the stories Father Mark had often told them, to the despair of some of his brethren.

"Sekeke," she said, "the Father told us once how our Lady heard the prayer of a girl who asked her, and sent much cattle to a man in need. I do not remember all his words, but he said the Mother of God stands near the throne of God, and whatever she asks of God, God gives. Let us therefore ask that she may give you five pounds.

"I am not washed," said Sekeke.

"But I am," said Agnesi, "and I will pray."

"Pray then," said Sekeke.

Agnesi looked up at the picture, and her courage failed her. She crouched on the ground, and said nothing. Thus it was Sekeke who prayed, and, not knowing what else to say, he said:

"O Mother of God, thou knowest I cannot get the cattle with which to satisfy the father of Agnesi. I

want five pounds. Please give me five pounds, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

Agnesi bent lower and trembled. She rather expected the appearance of an angel with five new-minted sovereigns, and she believed enough to be afraid of his approach. What Sekeke expected no man can say. Anyway, they waited about a quarter of an hour, and then he said abruptly, "Come." They went out. Outside he turned on her quickly. "Agnesi," he said, "I go to the mines now to earn the five pounds. It is a bad time, and I, maybe, will be away another year. Meanwhile thou art to wait for me, and if thou hast anything at all to do with another while I am not here, I will beat thee on my return. Farewell." And there and then he turned and left her, and set out for the mines.

Agnesi wept at such an extraordinary exhibition of energy.

In astonishment Father Mark put back the purse, out of which he had been trying to conjure five gold sovereigns and thought again regretfully of the dangers of the city. Probably only our Lady was content; it must have been her plan....

Anyway, the absolutely unexpected happened, an occurrence not in itself miraculous, but one which had no other explanation to the principals concerned. There is one great and golden daydream perpetually before the eyes of all boys who work in the mines, and that is that by chance they may find a diamond, and become rich in a moment, not on its value, but on the bonus given to the finder. Sekeke went straight from Agnesi to the *dorp*, and slept that night on a pile of skins outside a store. The next day he was taken on by a labour agent, and the next left for Kimberley in one of those open carriages which the S.A.R. provide for natives. In due course, having been much

inspected and marshalled and cursed, he and his gang arrived at the Diamond City and went out to the mines. For a week he laboured, chiefly underground, and fed and slept with the rest of the boys in their place, and on the eighth day he had not been five minutes in the mines when he picked up a diamond. It happens to be the simple truth that it was the eighth of December. Of course, the settlement of the business took some time; but one day the bewildered Sekeke was handed his discharge and eighty-five pounds in the central police station at Kimberley. The diamond was sold in England for four figures, but Sekeke never knew that.

The news reached the location on the Eve of the Epiphany, and it was brought by Sekeke himself. Agnesi had just come from the spring with an empty paraffin-tin of water on her head, when a man on a horse rode hard up to her door. It was Sekeke, gloriously dressed in full European clothes.

"Greeting," said Agnesi.

"Greeting, Agnesi," said Sekeke. "I have come for thee. See, here is a handkerchief and a blouse and a skirt for thee from the big city, and this is my horse that I ride, and I have redeemed my cattle. A boy is driving them even now to thy father. And I have much money more, for oxen and sheep, and it is well with us for ever."

Agnesi recovered slowly. "But how didst thou get it?" she asked finally.

"Thy Mary showed me a diamond," he said, as one who describes the commonplace.

They paid their thanks, doubtless, but Father Mark did not see them. What he did see was the thanksgiving of Gabrieli and the old grandfather. The two were inseparables, and the manner of their thanksgiving was as follows: Father Mark had a crib in the church, and that night, after supper, as he said his night

prayers, he heard steps at the door. He turned from his place to see who should be visiting the church so late, and from his own dark corner he saw Gabrieli and the old man come in. They adored the Sacrament, but went straight over to the crib. There they knelt awhile, fixing eyes of wonder on the three figures, and on the ox and ass. Then the old man, kneeling straight up, raised his hand in the old half-forgotten royal salute, and Gabrieli stretched out his towards the manger and deposited there a sticky handful of sweets, which had been his share, up to date, of Sekeke's treasure.

CHAPTER VI

FATHER FRANCIS

COURTENAY was new to the Mission, and, frankly, it astonished him. He had a kind of notion, when his letter of introduction had secured for him an invitation for the week or so while he waited for his boat, that he should be bored a little by the spectacle of a succession of religious activities from which he could not escape. He imagined, dimly, that there would be frenzied preaching to crowds of evil-smelling natives, a continual round of Bible classes, and a general atmosphere of a parish room combined with a church vestry. But there were none of these things. The talk in the Common Room and at table was frankly secular, and ranged from an animated discussion of the works of modern fiction to the perpetual problem of the European complications. (It was not so long before the Great War, and the Mission was not a little involved in Kaiserism.) There was a great deal of church-going, it is true, but Courtenay was not in the least pressed to attend, and when he did so he found a variety of services which struck him as being totally unlike anything he had expected. Not that he knew exactly what he did expect; but vague accounts of the Welsh Revival probably accounted for a good deal. Well, there was nothing revivalistic about the services. The morning ones were mostly silent, and in the rest Plainsong figured largely—which is a far cry from either Moody and Sankey or Torrey and Alexander. Then the laymen were largely busy in rational secular employments; the hospital was the same as a normal

hospital usually is ; and the priests were busy, for the most part, on strange errands which took them out on bicycles in the heat of the day, or equally mysteriously into church. Courtenay accompanied one who rode for about four hours over unspeakable paths for the sake of a sick-visit, and his mind was a conflict of emotions on the way back. He was extraordinarily hot, and had swallowed (or felt as if he had) quantities of sand ; why, then, men should devote their lives to that sort of thing, for no conceivable reward, was a matter beyond his stock of reason or religion.

For six days he heard no sermons at all, but on the seventh came one which filled him with amazement. It was preached by a newcomer, and therefore through an interpreter, so that Courtenay was able to follow it. The day chanced to be the Sunday within the Octave of St. Michael, and the sermon had taken for granted angels and devils and supernatural things generally to such an extent that Courtenay could hardly believe his ears. Did these people believe in such things ? He was resolved on some sort of inquiry.

After dinner he got an admirable opportunity. It was suggested that they should have the coffee on the verandah, and a layman had produced some excellent cigars—cheap enough out there. They all sat in easy lounge chairs, and Courtenay lazily contemplated the native huts, the glistening cocoanuts, and the still water of the creek, as the glory of a full moon illuminated the tropical world. Odd sounds came up to them without destroying the sense of stillness—the bark of a dog, the occasional shrill voice of a woman, the rustle of the leaves in a faint breeze. It was all very different from the matter-of-fact world. Courtenay commenced operations :

“ You see a side of the native of which most Europeans never catch more than a glimpse, I suppose ? ”

he said, vaguely, without addressing anyone in particular.

The Canon moved impatiently. He disliked that sort of thing. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "Anyway, I must be going. Good night, my lord; good night, everybody."

Courtenay felt rebuked. He turned towards the Bishop and opened a frontal attack apologetically. "I say," he said, "I hope I did not ask anything impossible, don't you know; but your doings out here interest me tremendously. You seem to take so much for granted that most of us don't so much as consider any longer, and I thought, perhaps, among the natives you saw a side of things that we never see. All these stories, now, about African magic and devils and so on—do you believe them?"

The Bishop looked at him with a half-smile. "It would be absurd to say that one believed in *all*," he said; "but I fancy you can't be long in this country without feeling that the commonplace explanation does not get to the bottom of everything; and you see we have to deal with a people to whom murder and witchcraft, and the power of the witch-doctor, and the truth of dreams, are as real as electricity and radio-activity are to you. We can't ignore it, and so we investigate a little, and sometimes one gets up against the impossible that as far as the evidence goes *has* happened—and there it is."

Courtenay looked interested. "Tell me just what you mean, can you?" he asked.

"Well," said the Bishop, "most Africans believe, for instance, that a witch-doctor can enter a locked and barred house without disturbing locks or bars, and leave again, having worked his mischief with the place as secure behind him as if he had never entered."

Courtenay smiled frankly. "Oh," he said, "Devant does that most days at 2.30 and 7.30 in St. George's Hall; but you don't mean to tell me it can be done here, in a hut like that, on the bare ground under the trees," and he waved his hand towards the town.

From somewhere or another a woman's scream came up to us, and we listened a moment after it had died away. Then the face of the Bishop was grave as he said: "Don't ask me; I don't know. I only know I had to move a teacher from a promising village only the other day because, irrefutably, his hut, windowless, and locked as to the door with a new Yale lock I gave him, was entered three nights running and the worst of mischief done. I don't know how it happened; I only know what I had to do."

"But——" began Courtenay, and then broke off. "Well," he said at last, "dreams and so on—do they ever come true?"

The Bishop put down his pipe and settled back in his chair. "I'll tell you the strangest story I've known of that sort, if you like, and one of the most beautiful, too. I don't know what you will make of it, but I don't mind your hearing."

Courtenay and I looked our eagerness, and this is what we heard:

"Some years ago," said the Bishop, "when I was priest in charge of an up-country station, a new man came out from England to join us. Father Mallory was his name, but we called him Father Francis, after his patron saint, for whom he had a great love. He was a slight-built man, and did not look a bit strong; but I never saw anyone out here so zealous before. He loved his work, and he had the gift of being able to relate every bit of it to the great central theme, so that even close study of Chinyanja, with the glass at ninety degrees in the shade, had attractions for him. What

was more, he got on wonderfully with the natives. Before he could say anything more than a phrase or two he would be out among the huts, and you would come across him, sitting on the ground playing with the children, with all the zest in the world. That was why 'Father Francis' stuck to him, I believe. The people loved him instinctively, and he them. He used to spend hours in the day just praying. None of us on the station felt otherwise, I fancy, than that he had the makings of a saint.

"He preached a course in the village church that Lent, I remember, in a curious mixture of English and Chinyanja. The amazing thing was that the church was crowded, and that they all seemed to understand him as he sat there, talking quietly, like a man who sees the thing he describes. From my place in the stalls I used to watch the astounding performance with a half-text running in my head: 'Every man heard in his own language in which he was born.'

"But you don't mean ..." broke in Courtenay. The Bishop silenced him by a kind of gesture, and went on.

"You will guess, of course, what comes next. The fever got him, and he couldn't shake it off. He only lasted a day or two. I was with him all the last day, and he died like a man who sleeps, his fingers round his beads, towards evening. We buried him in the little cemetery in the morning, after a requiem in church, all the village following, and we settled down to our loss. I remember I wrote to his people; he had been out seven months.

"About a week later I was sitting writing in my study, when I heard the entrance call spoken outside. I said 'Come in,' and there walked in one of our best boys, a tall lad, about seventeen then. I ought to tell you that we had a small school on the place, and that the

boys sat in the front rows in church, just beyond the rood screen, which was native work, and open, the rood held up by a pillar or two.

“ ‘Hulloa, Lawrence,’ said I, ‘what do you want?’ ”

“ Now a native rarely answers you at once on the subject of his visit ; but on this occasion the boy said instantly :

“ ‘Father, I have seen a vision, and I want to tell it you.’ ”

“ I looked at him sharply. His eyes looked into mine absolutely steadily, and there was that about him which caught my attention. I was very busy, but I put my pen down, leaned back in my chair, and said : ‘ Well, Lawrence, and what was it ? ’ ”

The Bishop was silent a while. I stirred in my wicker chair, and the creaking recalled him.

“ I’m sorry,” he said, “ but I was wondering how to tell it you. I had better say just what Lawrence said, as far as I can remember his words. I don’t attempt to explain them, mind. This is what he said :

“ ‘ It was in the night, father, and I was sleeping between Ambrose and John, as thou knowest. Suddenly, in my sleep, I felt cold, and I heard a lizard stir in the thatch, and I awoke. Then I saw that I was not in the hut, but in the church, and that the altar was lit with the lights as for Mass. I wondered to myself at being there, and looked round. Yes, all the other boys were there, and many people, and all looked towards the altar as if they waited for something. Then did I look again, and then, my father, I grew very afraid. At first I did not know why I was afraid, but then I understood. Thou knowest the screen in the church, my father ? Well, I knelt near it, where is my place, and the altar seemed but a little way beyond it ; but I knew, on a sudden, that it was very far. I grew cold as that knowledge came to me. It seemed to me that a great gulf stretched in between us and

the holy place, and yet I could see easily. And, as I feared, the door from the sacristy opened and the boys came in for Mass. I did not know any of the boys, father, but they came, the Cross and the lights and the incense, all but the serving boy and the priest, and instead of them came a man whom also I did not know. I could see his face very clearly, my father, and I should know it again. He had a small brown beard and blue eyes which looked through you, and I noticed particularly that he was dressed in a very patched cassock, my father. He came right down to the steps under the big cross on the screen, and he looked down at us boys sitting below him. And then he spoke, my father, and his words were these: "Father Mallory is here and waiting to say his Mass. Which of you boys will serve him?" At that my heart turned to ice, and my feet were like lead. I felt that I wanted to jump up and say; "I," father, but I dared not move. And as I sat I was not in the church, but in my bed, and the lizard still rustled in the thatch.' "

"Well, I questioned him," said the Bishop, "but I could get no more out of him than that. He was curiously particular about the face of the man who had spoken, and that was all. I feared he might have some suspicion as to why *he* had seen that thing and so I asked him right out at last: 'And what do you think it means, Lawrence?' At that he stared at me without answering for quite a long time, and then said: 'I do not know, my father. But I shall not die. I should have had to die if I had stood up.' "

The clock in the church tower near struck slowly just then, and we allowed it to finish without a word. Then: "Well?" said Courtenay, a little impatiently, I thought.

“ Yes, there is a sequel,” said the Bishop, “ though I think it a chance that I know it. The sequel only happened the other day. I had long left the station, and had been made Bishop, and Lawrence was a certificated teacher somewhere up in the hills; I did not quite know where. However, I had to make a tour of his district, and towards evening, on my way to the coast, I reached his village. He seemed very pleased to see me, and we talked for a long time about many things, but not at all of the old station. As a matter of fact I did not particularly remember Lawrence, as he had grown out of all knowledge. I certainly had no thought at all of his vision. In the morning I said Mass, and talked to his people, and arranged to set out for the coast, a three days’ walk still, at nine o’clock; and then went to my breakfast. Half way through it Lawrence presented himself at the tent door. I told him to come in and sit down while I finished, and he came in and sat down on the floor, talking about odd things, while I drank up my coffee and finished the marmalade. Then I lit my pipe, pushed back my chair, and said, ‘ Well, Lawrence, and what do you want especially ? ’

“ I was all attention the moment he spoke. ‘ Dost thou remember my vision when I was a boy at school, my father ? ’ he said.

“ Then, of course, I remembered. ‘ Oh, yes,’ said I, ‘ what about it ? ’

“ ‘ Only this, my father, that I saw it again last night, and now I know I am to die.’

“ That was a little startling, and I knew that it does not do for natives to get ideas like that; so I thought that I would laugh and pass it off. But then I looked more closely at him, and instead I said, ‘ Tell me.’

“ I’ll spare you all the story. It seems he had ‘ woke ’ in the night again, and ‘ found himself ’ in

the old church. This time, however, he was not with the boys, but behind with the congregation. He said that, just as before, he had no sense at first of anything strange, and no immediate remembrance of his former vision; but as he looked towards the altar he was conscious of 'the gulf,' and remembered. Then the procession came in as before—all but the priest and the server. And this is how he finished telling me the story: 'The same man as before, my father—I knew him at once—came in, and he came right forward to the steps and looked down the church. I was horribly afraid, because I knew what he would say. And he said it: "Father Mallory is here and waiting to say his Mass. Which of you will serve him?" But the moment he had said it, my father, I knew that I feared no more at all. I got up, just where I was, at once, and I said, "I will," and the man looked full at me and smiled, and held up his hand as if to beckon me, and I saw that he had a wound in his hand—and I was again in my house, my father.' "

"Well, I examined him, and he was as sound as a bell. I laughed at the idea of his death, and told him we ought not to put our trust in visions, but only in God, and he was respectful and quiet. But he wished me 'good-bye' with a strange air of finality, and knelt for a moment or two after my blessing.

"I got to the coast in good time, and found my mail not in, so that that night I slept in the hotel. At breakfast the waiter told me that a native was outside asking for me, and when I had finished I went to him. I don't know why, but I had a strange premonition of bad news, and I got it at once. It seems that Lawrence was killed by the chance fall of a heavy branch from a cocoanut tree the morning after I had left his place. He had put all his affairs in order,

and had told his wife to send word to me *when he died*. Then he went about his work as usual. He had taught in school all the morning, and gone out to visit some Christians in another village that afternoon. On his way back one of those dead boughs that swing from the cocoanuts till some sharp gust brings them unexpectedly down, fell right across his path. The heavy end struck his head, and he died without a word. He had stood up, you see."

I looked at Courtenay. He was staring at the Bishop without a word, a curious, tense look on his face. "Come," said the Bishop, pulling out his watch, "it's time for Compline. Do you care to come, Mr. Courtenay?" We went down the stairs. I hung back at the top, and the Bishop passed near me. "The man with the pierced hand," I said. "What do you think?" "A little beyond Mr. Courtenay, I fear," he said; "but then he could scarcely be expected to credit the stigmata."

CHAPTER VII

THE PENITENCE OF PETER

I HAD often wanted to visit St. Agatha's, but had never been able to make the time. Fifty-odd miles constitute a barrier of no little importance when the only road is a trail hardly discernible in parts, spruit-cut in places, and at its best a dusty or sandy way according to the time of year. But I had real need at last, and the opportunity had to be made. So one fine morning, the air still fresh and clear after a heavy shower or two a few days before, I ordered out my horse, packed my saddlebags with what constitutes a change of clothing in these parts, cut myself a package of sandwiches, and rode away. The route lay down the hill and over the river ; then round the spur of a near mountain, and so out to the open plain ; then through the nearly ripe fields of mealies and Kaffir corn, where the birds sang and the wind passed with music, to the distant Nek in the hills that lay between us. There are days in Africa when the feeling that it is good to be alive is stronger here than anywhere else. This was one of them. The sky was blue above ; the herd-boys on the veld had discarded their blankets, and for the most part were lying hid among the rocks ; and the wind caught up and spun by little cones of dust that whirled from nowhere into nowhere as if they were glad of it. At the same Nek I lunched. The way was plain before and behind ; behind, almost to the hilly camp I had left ; before, to where hills closed in again not far from St. Agatha's. Through the

long afternoon we wandered on, my horse and I, over a river or two—shining like silver under the rare trees—and through the lands, leaving the villages perched on the hillsides that we skirted, until the sun bid fair to set in an hour or so. We had mounted a bit of a rise, and it was plain that the land sloped to a river some distance away which skirted a range of unusually rocky heights. Above it, perhaps a mile to the north, on a little elevation, stood out a bare, tall cross. I called to Johnny, and we were away at a canter.

The Mission buildings clustered on the slope beyond the cross, among mealie fields. First there was the tiny church, and then the three or four thatched mud huts of the priest and his people behind. He came to meet me as I rode up, a tall, spare figure in his old black cassock; and although I was a layman and my life as different as possible from his, I think we were friends almost at once. I had a tin mug of tea immediately in the living hut, and then was shown round the estate. Dogs, horses, fowls and possibly pigs assume an importance out here almost beyond a city imagination. Then we came to the church.

It is years ago now since I saw it, but the memory has remained with me as fresh as ever till this day. The walls were stone, but the roof was mud and thatch. A bowl of holy water stood on a rude wooden pedestal at the door. Coloured oleographs of the Stations hung on the walls. There were no benches or chairs, but the altar was set up under a simple baldacchino, and two white statues graced the far windows of the north and south sides. In the centre of the west wall hung a big picture of the Madonna, and a red, flickering sanctuary lamp before the altar told of the presence of her Son. But I am old man enough now to know that none of these things accounted for the atmosphere

of the place. I do not know the theology or the psychology of it, but I know there are shrines where God's Self can be felt. So I knelt on the mats under our Lady's picture, and the peace of God that I had lost awhile came back to my soul.

Then Father Hugh explained things. Churches with a five hundred or a thousand pound reredos, designed by a famous artist, never know the joy of offering a baldacchino constructed by oneself out of old curtains and ceiling boards. I entirely agreed with him that it was better for the painted stars to look down on one from the roof in the order of their constellations, rather than in the conventional lines of a Prussian regiment, even if the Great Bear and the Southern Cross do not, in fact, occupy precisely that relative position in the heavens themselves. After all, as Father Hugh explained, one can only put in the constellations one knows. And so I heard his story—heard how the heathen herd-boys, in loin cloth and blanket, had come and asked to be shown the pictures of our Lord's passion; how the simple folk had adored the poor little Crib that first Christmas of its appearing; and how Blandina of her own initiative had gathered a bunch of the scarlet spring aloes of the wilderness to lay upon the floor, where they would wilt before our Lady. I remained while the priest rang Angelus and the bell for evensong. Then I knelt on the ground by the half-dozen of Christian natives who lived within its sound, and joined in the prayers which grew richer somehow in that atmosphere of heaven.

But it was our evening's talk that paved the way for this story. We had eaten our bacon and eggs off the tin plates, and had drunk quantities of tea; and then, with our pipes going strongly, while the lamplight shone on the mud walls, and we rested in deck chairs, we fell to talking. We shook the seats of bishops, and

speculated on the destinies of churches. I brought the news of the world to the bar of an outlook which judged it as the daily papers and the clubs do not. And then we fell to talking of the prospects of the native race with which we had to do. I contributed from the standpoint of hut-tax and labour agents; he, from the church and the homestead. He was no deluded negrophile enthusiast, but he had seen what was never shown to me.

"But," I said at last, "do you honestly think the native has what I suppose one would call spiritual perception? Is he ever likely to produce saints?"

The priest smiled. "Well," he said, in his quaint way, "I've seen none as yet, I'll admit, nor any who might develop into a Theresa or an Aquinas, but I think I have come across something very like the penitence of Peter, and I think the love of a St. John."

"Have you?" said I. "Tell me."

"What are you going to do to-morrow?" he asked abruptly.

"Anything you please," I said, "so long as I can see something of you."

"Well," said he, "come for a walk with me in the afternoon. I have to visit a village across the river, and I'll introduce you to a woman who learned penitence as I wish I might learn it, and I'll tell you her story as we return."

Naturally I agreed forthwith.

We set out after a bit of luncheon next day. It was an easy walk down to the river, and the river itself was not much to boast of in the way of water. But the great boulders looked cool, and the thin runnel sang softly among them. We crossed, and climbed up. Father Hugh called out a greeting to a tall young girl of thirteen or so, who, clad only in the bead girdle, was carrying a tin of water uphill on her head with

the grace of a Greek statue. "Why wast thou not at Mass on Sunday?" he asked.

"My mother was sick, and I had to go into the fields, O my father," said she; and we passed on satisfied.

In a little time we came on a village. The round huts were set down in accustomed irregularity, and each had its neat grass fence outside it to keep off the winds. Dogs ran out barking, to be followed by children, who all seemed to know Father Hugh, and who promptly drove off the dogs. He had a greeting for one and a question for another; but at last we stopped before a hut, outside of whose door, in the sun, sat a middle-aged man, with the shadow of sickness on his face.

Father Hugh sat down beside him. "How art thou to-day, Isaaca?" he asked.

"No better, my father," answered the sick man. "My cough was bad when I awoke, and to-day I have been spitting blood much again. I am near to my rest, O my father, I think."

"I am sorry, Isaaca," said the priest, "but hast thou remembered about not doing hard work, as I told thee?"

"I remember, my father, and I do not do much, as thou orderest. But yesterday I cut new grasses for this house, which needs them before the rains; that was all, father."

Father Hugh turned to me with a helpless gesture. "What is one to do?" he said. "This fellow is dying of consumption, and he goes into the hot sun and climbs the steep hillside for hours, cutting grass. Hi, Cypriani, there!"

A tall boy came up, all smiles.

"Cypriani," said the priest, "do thou behold Isaaca? He is sick and cannot work. Wilt thou cut

the grass for his house that Mama-David may thatch for him? Thou wilt not be doing it only for him," he added.

The boy looked at the sick man and then at the priest. "I go, my father," he said, simply, and walked away.

"Go in peace," said Father Hugh, smiling, and then, to the sick man, "Where is thy wife this day, Isaaca?"

"She is grinding in the other house, father," said he. "I will call her."

"No, no," said Father Hugh, "we will seek her. Be thou in peace."

"Go in peace, my father," echoed the sick man; and we made for another hut.

Within, in the shade, a somewhat toilworn woman was busily rolling a stone backwards and forwards on another hollowed flat one, pouring a handful of mealies, from time to time, into the hollow. Two others watched her. She stopped as we came in, and as Father Hugh greeted them, the other two by their heathen names and her as Mama-David, she got up elaborately to shake hands. I looked at her closely. She was just a typical native woman, clad in two blankets, rather heavy-looking, with tired eyes. A cheap medal of the Blessed Virgin hung by a string of beads round her neck, and she wore a rosary also. She was glad to see us.

Father Hugh made her sit down. They talked of various things, and then he asked her a question or two about last Sunday's instruction. She answered rather feebly, and broke down in the Divine Praises. He turned to me with a rather quizzical smile, and said in English, "You see, our converts haven't much intellectual perception anyway, Mr. Magistrate. How can you expect the spiritual?" Then he said a prayer or two, and we made our departure with the usual salutations, and walked out into the sun.

A little way down the hill he turned to me and said :
“ It is of Mama-David that I want to tell you ; but I wanted you to see her first. I don't know what you will make of the story, but you shall hear it, anyway.

“ Two years ago Isaaca was a heathen, but his wife a Christian. He never opposed her religion, but he would make no effort at all to accept it. She used to come fairly regularly to her duties, and he used to sit at home and cough as his sickness grew on him. One day, however, as she was setting out for Mass and for her communion, he said to her :

“ ‘ Thou art going to receive thy sacrament to-day, woman ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ said she.

“ ‘ It is very strong medicine, is it not ? ’ he asked.

“ She hesitated a minute, and then said, ‘ Yes.’

“ ‘ Well,’ said he, ‘ Thou must this day do as I tell thee. When the priest gives thee thy sacrament, thou shalt not eat of it, but bring it in thy hand to me, who am sick, that I may eat and be well.’

“ I believe that at first she refused vehemently ; but he insisted. She said she knew that it would be a great sin, first because it was unlawful for him to eat of that Bread, being unbaptized, and secondly because she would deceive me, in hiding it. ‘ But how should the Washing make any difference to the power of the medicine ? ’ said he, ‘ and no one will know what thou doest.’ She could not answer him as to the theology, naturally, but she was prompt on the second point. ‘ Our Lord Jesus Christ will know,’ said she, ‘ for it is His Body that thou askest me to steal for thee, and I cannot do it.’

“ Then he swore at her, and seized a stick to beat her, and the effort brought on the cough again, and for the first time he spat blood. That frightened her, I think, and she promised to conceal the Host when

I placed it in her hand, and only make a pretence of eating. She said she would bring it straight to him from the church.

“Of course I knew nothing of this at all, and that morning the service went as usual. It happened to be a feast day of some importance, and there were many communicants, which made her task easier. Perhaps also I was quicker than usual. Anyway, when I placed our Lord’s Body on her hand, she made a pretence only of eating, and then, closing her hand firmly, she placed it behind her, and received from the chalice without touching it, as I have taught them to do. She went back to her place for the rest of the service, and did not open her hand. Then, as soon as possible, she left the church and made straight for home. Neither I nor anyone else knew, or need have known, anything of it.

“I had said my thanksgiving, and come into the hut for my late breakfast. I was just pouring out my tea when I heard Cypriani, outside the door, call out sharply in surprise. ‘What is it, Cypriani?’ I said. ‘There is a woman running, father,’ he said, ‘and she seems in great fear.’

“At that I went outside, and stood in the doorway by his side. Sure enough, coming up the hill between the fields was a woman, half-running, half-walking, evidently as one who is nearly exhausted. Even from there we could see that she was much alarmed. The handkerchief had gone from her head, and, what was strangest, she held her right arm straight before her as she came, with the hand tightly clenched. I hurried down towards her, and when she saw me she broke into a run until, reaching me, she dropped on her knees, her hand still tightly clenched before her, and sobbed out, gaspingly, ‘Father, save me! The Blood is on my hand! The Blood is on my hand!’

"I could not conceive what she meant. I knelt beside her and tried to quiet her, but she would do nothing but cry, 'The Blood is on my hand! The Blood is on my hand!' 'Which hand?' I asked, and she thrust her right hand into my lap.

"Then I think I guessed a little. A small crowd had gathered, and I ordered them all away, and told her to come with me to the church. She was afraid at first; but I ordered it, and I led her by the arm out of the sun into the quiet of the sanctuary. We knelt together before the altar, and then I told her to open that right hand. At first again she refused, but then at last, holding it straight before her, she unclasped her fingers. As they opened, her face grew grey, as a negro's will, and she dropped forward on the floor in a perfect terror, crying, 'The Blood! the Blood! Oh, my father, the Blood is on my hand!'

"But I could see nothing there."

The priest walked on in silence for so long that I interrupted his thoughts. "What did you do?" I asked.

"I took her hand in mine," he said, "which calmed her, and then I got out the whole story. It seemed that the moment she opened her hand in the hut to give her husband what she had stolen, it seemed to her that the palm and fingers were red with blood. She had shrieked in the hut, and ran instantly, just as she was, straight back to me, conscience-stricken and terrified as I had found her. So she gasped the tale out to me while I held her hand."

"And what then?" I persisted.

His face changed rather, as he answered, "It was very beautiful," he said. "I made her confess to that and all her other sins, and I gave her absolution, with a prayer in my heart such as I have never prayed before. Then I led her to the altar, and once more

bade her open her hand. She did it slowly, one finger after another, at first with half-averted head, then with the dawn of a great gladness in her eyes ; and as the last finger opened, she burst into a flood of happy tears, murmuring something that I could not catch.

“ ‘ What is it ? ’ I said, bending down.

“ ‘ The Blood is on my soul now, father,’ she whispered. ‘ The Blood is on my soul.’ ”

I don’t think we spoke again until we reached the church door, and then—“ ‘ The penitence of Peter,’ but what about ‘ The love of John,’ father ? ” I asked.

He smiled. “ Oh, that is another story,” said he.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KINGDOM

DURING the great war, the Union-Castle boats had to take on their passengers at Tilbury, and many of the usual experiences of African travel were upset. There was no slipping over to Marseilles and stealing a march of a week on your boat; and there was no crowded ship at Southampton, with pretty girls and anxious mothers on all the decks, blocking up the gangways and getting cups of tea in the saloon, as there used to be. Instead, passengers said good-bye to their friends at Fenchurch Street Station, which was enough to depress anyone at any time, let alone the friends of people off to the Tropics along routes patronised by German submarines. Even to old travellers, therefore, there was something new in the process of departure; and although the Rev. Stuart Malcolm was an old traveller, and the Rev. John Mason was a young one, they both elbowed their way through the unaccustomed crush, and struggled frantically to get their stuff into carriages without the aid of porters, who had been long since swallowed up in the crowd. The Rev. Stuart got in first, and found the fifth place in the first-class carriage. The Rev. John, a stranger to him, arrived second, and got the sixth by a sprint in order to forestall a person with endless small parcels and an enormous trombone in a case, but a sprint which caused him to abandon a suit case half way down the platform. However, that was how they formed their friendship.

“Phew! that was a near thing,” said the Rev. John. “Fearful crowd here. It’s all rubbish, I think, their

not allowing passengers' friends at the dock. Let me see, is all my stuff in? No, I've left that suit case! I say, sir, would you mind keeping my seat for me while I go and get it?"

The gentleman addressed—about sixty and apparently gouty—looked up from his *Land and Water* with no vast amount of eagerness. Therefore the Rev. Stuart sailed in. "I will," he said.

"Thanks," said John, and then, noticing for the first time that he was a parson, with just that right touch that shows you feel that there is something between you in common, "Thanks very much."

At Tilbury they got separated in the rush for the luggage that ought to be in the cabins and isn't, but they met on the promenade deck as the ship was casting off. Casting-off can be an interesting operation, but there is not much to be said for it at five o'clock on a late November foggy day in the Thames Basin when there are no friends on the wharf.

"We shall see our last of England better off Dover, or Falmouth, where they drop the pilot these days," said the Rev. Stuart. "Come and have some tea." And they went down into the saloon together.

That, of course, clinched the matter. The tribe of chief stewards, anxiously trying to arrange their passengers by the light of a remarkably limited intelligence, always look out the parsons and put them all together. Perhaps they think that is safest. Anyway, your new curate, just off to missionise in Timbuctoo with a certain sense of satisfaction in having abandoned (finally, as he desperately hopes) all thralldom of frock coats and rural deans, is usually taken confidently aside by the representative of this worthy tribe for the time being, with an air which would have sat well on Guy Fawkes, and informed: "I've put you next the other reverend gentleman,

sir, at the captain's table." It requires more than the average nerve to say: "Well, then, for heaven's sake put me somewhere else quickly. Who was that girl in the blue hat I saw on deck just now? Miss Helena? Well, put me near Miss Helena at the second officer's table," and so it does not often get said. Therefore the old haunting danger remains—that you will have to talk the Oxford Movement with a Simeonite, or (worse still) Church Reform with a member of the Board of Finance, all the way from the Nore to Kilindini or the Cape.

Anyway, to go down to tea the first night with the other parson is to throw up the sponge, and of course Malcolm and Mason found themselves opposite at dinner. But there Providence stepped in. The two men, different as they were from one another, formed a friendship which still continues.

Stuart Malcolm had been on the East Coast a good many years, and he was going out now to the Cape because the war had limited missionary effort in the East more than a little. He was a man of no peculiar gifts except those of strong sympathy and that delicate apprehension of the meaning of things which comes near to being spiritual second-sight. But he was genial and honest, frankly interested in everybody and everything, no vain talker and no fool; in fact, an ideal companion. John Mason was young and at present enthusiastic, the sort of priest who may develop into the man whom the Church at home forgets and some native tribe remembers, as Wessex men remembered Wilfrid, or who may, on the contrary, be so horribly discouraged in a couple of years that he returns home, and marries, and accepts what he thinks will be an easy billet—only there are no easy billets in the Church, though some men will only discover that before the Judgment Seat.

Stuart and John, then, became real friends. At first they talked mostly of the obvious things, that is to say, of the war and of the future of Europe, and they could hardly do otherwise when the bulkheads were closed and the boats lowered all down Channel ; when searchlights pierced each night from hidden warships and from distant forts ; and when destroyers and other light craft, including an aeroplane squadron the second day out, were constantly objects of interest. But they dropped the pilot at Falmouth and got their last papers, and the *Wireless Mail* had neither the opportunities nor the imagination of the Harmsworth dailies. By the time they were over the Line you scarcely knew that Europe was at war, and it was then that the two priests got on to other topics.

One night, comfortably hidden behind the wind-screen in two easy chairs, pipes going, and Jupiter bobbing up and down astern as if the ship were motionless and he at sea, John spoke his soul. " I'm longing, father," he said, " to see a native congregation at the Mass. I want to *see* the ancient sacrifice part and parcel of the life of a new race, and to hear the holy words in the new tongue. And then, when I can speak it ! Of course, I know there are disappointments and all that, but I think the lift of things must be tremendous if only one has eyes to see and a soul to feel."

" That's exactly how I felt twenty years ago," said Malcolm, slowly.

" And don't you now ? " queried John. " Forgive me, but I should have thought *you* would have done so, anyway, father."

The older priest moved slowly in his chair and looked at him. " Have you thought of what the words of our Blessed Lord and of the Evangelists and Apostles might mean ? " he asked.

" What words especially ? " queried John.

“ ‘ I came not to call the righteous, but sinners ’ ; ‘ They brought unto Him the maimed, the blind, the halt, the lame ’ ; ‘ You see your calling, brethren ; not many noble, not many wise ’ ; ‘ He that loseth his life shall find it, ’ ” he quoted, softly.

The wind-screen flapped for a minute or two before either spoke again.

Then said John : “ I don’t think I see exactly what you mean.”

“ No,” said Malcolm, “ I don’t think you could be expected to, but, you see, you are looking forward to congregations, and to big savages kneeling before the altar, and—and all that, aren’t you ? Of course, you’re sensible enough to know of the other side, but still, honestly, you expect success ? ”

“ Well,” said John, a little sententiously, “ ‘ My Word shall not return to Me void. ’ ”

“ Exactly,” said Malcolm, “ but what does *He* count success ? ”

Again the wind-screen rattled on.

“ Tell me,” said John.

“ I will if you like,” said Malcolm. “ I’ll tell you of my first thirty-six hours in the Mission, and of what our Lord showed me then. Things have looked a little different ever since.”

“ It’s twenty-two years, as I said, since I first went out,” he went on. “ In those days the boats were smaller and one went more slowly, but otherwise it has not changed much. I travelled in a British India that first time, and she did not carry string bands or rich Jews. We lumbered along through the Mediterranean, and broiled in the Red Sea, but the longest bit of all was between Aden and Zanzibar. You longed for trees, and the shore, and a church, I can tell you. And then one morning we dropped anchor off the Sultan’s palace, in fairyland. I remember to this day

how blue was the sky and how clear the water, and how they got the huge barges alongside and began to unload, while a small boat came out for us, rowed by four stalwart Swahili, with the St. George's Cross at her stern. It was a sheer marvel how they got our trunks down the side, but soon we were dancing away over the sea, and the layman in the stern was telling us that the Bishop was there, and (what we had nearly forgotten, that it was the Fifth Sunday in Lent. Then we landed, and went up through the narrow streets. My word! but I can still feel the heat from the white walls of the old fort, and smell the smells of the Indian shops, with their strings of beads and piles of cottons, and dirty yellow salesmen sitting on big red cushions and smoking. Then there were the Indian women in yellows and brick-reds and silver, and the little naked children, and the stately native women with baskets of yellow fruit on their heads, and the goats, and the donkeys, and the tall cocoanut trees—it has never been quite the same since. So we came by the narrow streets to where the gate opens on to a veritable garden, as it seemed, and in it was the slim-spined, beautiful cathedral. Service was on, our guide said. Instantly I was afire to go. I longed to see the packed building, with everyone praising God. So we went in through the door.

“The altar was as I had seen it in the pictures, and the six tall lights were burning in the hot sun, and there was the cool apse of the sanctuary, and I knew that the slave market had been there before. But Mass was over, and everyone kneeling. And they were singing—it was the custom then, in Lent—the Miserere, to a plainsong chant. I went in, kneeled with the rest, and took it up. ‘Thou shalt purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; Thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow,’ but somehow it was as if someone

had laid cold fingers on my heart. I can't explain ; it was only just an impression ; you may not understand it. But wait.

"After church we went up to the house, and it was all very wonderful. I could have sat and looked at the Bishop without speaking for a long time, and there was everyone else of whom I had heard so much, and the buildings that had almost been laid in blood. But after lunch they told us the news they had hitherto kept back so as not to damp our arrival. It was in the days of much fever, you know, and no one really understood then how to combat it, so that Death walked pretty near everyone there. And he had touched one of the staff the night before. The funeral was to be that very afternoon. It was my second service.

"I shall never forget a single detail of that walk to the cemetery—out of the city, down by the creek, past the African quarters with the brown huts and the tall trees, and away to the little enclosed place with its tall cross and its simple mounds. Two enormous trees of frangipanni stood by the gate in full bloom, and another had dropped some of its waxen sweet-scented flowers into the open grave. The service was very solemn ; the Bishop in a black cope and mitre, the swinging censer, the little African servers in their red cassocks, and the silent crowd of Christians and Indians and Mohammedans who stood in or around the graveyard. I was near the Bishop and the grave, and I could see the name-plate distinctly as the coffin was lowered in. One thing, however, stood out on it to me as nothing else did. 'Aged 19.' I could not get away from that. 'Aged 19.' So young, so keen, so full of life, he had only come out to the Mission six months before, and I suppose he, too, had delighted in the scents and sounds and sights : and now, dead. The

tropic evening fell swiftly as we walked on by the shore, for I was to go to the big school for a little, and that lay out of the town by the sea. The crickets, new to me then, were shrilling away in the African almond trees, and the water lapped on the coral beach in the way that I have never ceased to love, but I kept on saying to myself, 'Aged 19, aged 19.' What sort of Master was this to serve, Who called His servants so speedily away? What sort of service was this on which to embark, which had its reward so early in the grave?

"The big school revived me, however. It was a wonderful place. I saw the boys drawn up in two long files under the cloisters near the chapel for the evening roll-call, all of them looking clean and neat, and then I heard them sing Evensong exquisitely in the solemn little chapel. We were very merry, too, at dinner, talking of the home news, and getting first introductions to African curries and *papai*, and then afterwards we had coffee on the flat roof under the wonderful stars, and looked away over the thick woods where the fireflies glinted under the trees, to the lights of the city and the headlights of the ships at sea.

"I was keen to begin the language in the morning right away, and sat in the library, a cool room full of books, a bit insect-bitten, but still a library and books; and at lunch I was very keen to see something of the island.

" 'Well,' said one of the priests, 'I can give you a chance. I have to go about six miles inland to take a baptism this afternoon, and you can come if you like.'

" 'Rather,' said I, 'when shall we start?'

" 'Immediately after lunch,' said he, and immediately after lunch we set out, he and I together, I carrying a bag with the little font and the shell in it, he another with his vestments. It was a jolly walk. Everything was new to me, and behind my sense of

the brightness of the woods and the fairness of the world was a sense of triumph, too, for I was going to a baptism on my first day, and 'Go, teach, baptize,' unconsciously rang in my ears.

"We were hot before we got to the place, but at last my companion pointed to a clearing among the clove trees we were walking through, and said, 'That's the place. Do you see that hut, just past the big one? He lives there, the boy we have come to baptize.'

"Just then a peculiar sonorous noise fell on my ears. 'What's that?' asked I. 'What?' said he, and listened. 'Oh,' he went on, 'that's the sound of chanting in the mosque. It'll be the time of afternoon prayer.'

"'Which is the mosque?' I asked.

"'That big hut with the little apse sticking out on this side,' he said. 'You'll see in a minute.'

"And we did. We paused for a moment as we passed the door. The dark interior was full of men in white, their heads bowed to the ground, at prayer. There seemed to me to be many for this lonely place. I said as much to the priest.

"'Yes,' he said, 'there are mosques everywhere, and the people are all Mohammedans. Practically, we haven't touched them. But come on.'

"We walked on thirty yards, and entered the hut he had just shown me. It was very hot and oppressive and dark inside, and I could see nothing for a little; but then I made out the centre pole and a few calabashes and a big jar of brown pottery, and three kneeling women, and a native litter of poles and cocoanut rope in the corner. On it lay a boy about sixteen years old. I thought his face looked strange in the half-light, but I realised nothing till a movement, as he turned, let fall part of the cotton sheet over him, and then I saw where his hand had been. . . . He was a leper, far gone in the disease,

“ God forgive me, but I knelt by the door all the time in a kind of horror ; I couldn't have gone nearer. I was even angry for not having been told. But I forgot my anger soon for another thought. I fought against it, but could not help it—the Prophet with his big hut packed with stalwart men, and my Master with the three women and the dying leper boy. I watched it all in a kind of dream. Even when the priest propped the lad up in bed, and when there came the tinkle of the falling water, and the triumphant words, ‘ Michael, I baptize thee in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,’ it meant nothing to me. Only ‘ Michael ’ I thought : what a name for a leper boy ! It was my third service.

“ All the way home I fought the disappointment and the sickening sense of fear, but I won no victory at all. After Evensong I knelt on in church in a little side chapel before the Blessed Sacrament, and there, with no light but that of the flickering lamp, I learned my lesson. I had looked up at the Tabernacle, and tried to make out the carving, and at last I realised that the artist had cunningly decorated the woodwork all round with twining thorns that seemed almost alive. And then, suddenly, I bowed my head into my hands, and I knew what the Miserere, and the young life cut short, and the leper boy, Michael, all meant. Our Lord had been crowned with thorns, and this was His Kingdom.”

John sat on with never a word. “ Somehow,” said Malcolm at last, “ I have been content, ever since, to serve.”

CHAPTER IX

BLACK MAGIC

SETHLARE had a hut all by itself fairly high up in the lower Malutis, and he was a witch-doctor. Unfortunately, however, for the teller of true stories, he was not at all like the wizard of romance, nor was his residence in keeping. That was as neat a rondhavel as you could find in the Lesuto, the reed fence to keep out the wind a good eight feet high and strong at that, and the interior very clean swept and practically empty. He had bones, but he kept them in a small tin trunk, with a lock (key long since lost), painted chocolate and yellow, and made in the Midlands. He never wore them, nor the insides of animals, nor their skins either, if you except a very nice cap of catskins which Gunning had tried to buy for as much as half-a-sovereign—and failed. The cap, and a good blanket, and a pair of corduroy trousers that had once belonged to a trooper of the B.M.P. (since deceased), made up the old man's entirely respectable wardrobe.

There was only one noticeable fact against Sethlare, in short, and that was that he lived alone. Men do not live alone in the world of the Bantu except for some uncommon reason. Sethlare therefore, at first sight, was peculiar. Inquiry substantiated the suspicion. He came from no one knew where, though he was a true enough Mosuto, and he had the greatest reputation for doctoring of anyone within a hundred miles.

After Sethlare and Gunning, Father Paul is the third person of importance in this history, and

he was an old man with a stubbly, short, white beard who knew more about the ways of the people than anyone else in the Protectorate, and who said considerably less about them than anyone else either. It fell to his lot in life to travel ceaselessly up and down the mountains after his Christians, and he did it, unromantically, on a chestnut pony that was blind of an eye, and so old that no one knew his age, with a boy called Laurence, who looked after the old priest's outfit as if he was his father.

Now since Sethlare lived in a rather secluded valley, it chanced that he arrived (from no one knew where) and settled down and abode two years before Father Paul came to hear of his existence. But one day, about midsummer, riding up the valley of the Sinku rather more slowly than usual since old Masupong had a cough and a cold, the Father spotted the new hut where previously no hut had been. It was placed, with extreme respectability, on the slope of the hill, near neither rocky gorge nor lightning-split trees (as it ought to have been), and consequently the reverend father made no guess as to its occupant. He merely called up Laurence and asked for information.

Laurence, as has been said, looked after Father Paul as if Father Paul were his own son instead of the boot being on the other leg, so he replied, although he knew all about Sethlare, much as follows :

“ That hut, as thou sayest, my father, is new since the father was last in this place. No Christian, however, lives there, so thou needest not leave the road. There is only a man there who has come from no one knows where, and who has built for himself in this valley.”

Laurence hoped that that would end it ; but he had made one mistake. “ With whom does he live ? ” asked Father Paul. “ Is he married ? Has he any children ? If he has come from a place unknown,

maybe it is a Christian place, and perhaps his children have been taught."

Laurence sighed his gratitude. Father Paul would ride ten miles for the sight of a new child. "He has no children, father," said he.

"No children?" asked Father Paul. "Is his wife there, then?"

"He has no wife, father," said Laurence.

The old man reined up Masupong, who stopped, indeed, by instinct. "Then with whom does he live?" asked he.

"He lives alone," said Laurence, and knew he was done at that.

"Alone!" exclaimed the missionary; "and what then is this strange man who comes from no one knows where and settles far from houses up here, and who lives alone at that? What is he, Laurence?"

"I do not know," said Laurence, and lied—desperately, it is true, but in the hope that the reverend father might even then be content to go on.

"Then I will go and see," said Father Paul, "and do you stay here." He turned his horse to the hill, and Laurence, stopping long enough to hobble the pack-horse, turned his horse after him—which was the way of the pair of them.

Father Paul reined up his horse at the door, and asked if anyone was in. "Come in, my father," said a voice. "I am glad to see you."

"There," said Father Paul to Laurence, "he has seen us from afar, and he knows that I am a priest. I am glad we have come"; and he got off his horse and entered, a queer, short figure, with his old cassock tied up round his waist, and an ancient *terai* on his head.

"How do you do?" he said, speaking like a native. "I am very glad to see you. I do not pass this way often, and when I was on this road last you were not

here, so that now I thought I would visit you. Where do you come from ? ”

“ I am glad to see you also, my father,” said the native. “ Has the father come far ? Is he tired ? Will he stay here the night ? I am the servant of my father, and will kill a sheep if he will stay.”

“ Have you a sheep ? ” asked Father Paul. “ I saw no kraal.”

“ There is a sheep that is lost in the valley behind this, my father. Its owner is on his way here to me to find it, and he will not mind if I kill it, for I will pay him well. He knows me.”

Father Paul looked at him curiously. (Laurence made the sign of the Cross unperceived.) Then his eyes strayed round the hut and over Sethlare, and he found all, as I have said, clean and tidy.

“ How do you know there is a sheep yonder ? ” asked he.

“ I know,” said Sethlare, simply. “ Will the father stay here one night ? ”

“ The father goes on to the chief Gunning at the store, O Sethlare,” said Laurence, “ and the white man expects him, so that he cannot stay.”

Father Paul glanced from one to the other, quickly. Laurence knew the man’s name, and had not told him ! Laurence was strongly opposed to staying the night—and the man lived alone, and knew of the sheep.

“ What are you ? ” said Father Paul.

“ I am a doctor,” said Sethlare, simply.

For myself I should like to have heard Father Paul talk, for the old man is no fool. He knew perfectly well that there was black magic and white magic, and that both hide secrets that have not yet been docketed and labelled and stored and reduced to a collection of Greek syllables by your intelligent men of science who journey with regularity, and a large

entourage, through the wilder portions of Africa solely to that end. So he neither laughed nor ran away, just yet. Instead, I believe, he talked first of the weather, and then of the crops, and then of the cattle, and only finally of doctoring, with the most simple air in the world. Also he stayed the night with Sethlare.

About four, Laurence was dispatched to fetch the sheep. "Cross the hill," said the doctor, "and from the top of it you will see a little kloof on the right in the valley having a big white stone near its summit. Below the kloof is a small spruit, with six peach trees growing together. The sheep is feeding near the peach trees. Bring him." He was, and Laurence brought him. He was killed and eaten that night, in our Biblical and primitive manner, and afterwards, over the fire, they talked of many things.

"Yes," said Sethlare. "I am a doctor, my father, but I have heard of the Faith of the Church, and it is a good Faith. Therefore I am not as the old doctors. I find the cattle when they are lost, and I have knowledge of medicines which you white men do not know, or despise. Nevertheless I can curse if I will. But I do not curse, my father. I desire to abide here in peace. And I am old, as thou art, and shall go soon whither there is no return, and I shall learn then what now I do not understand."

"There is a return," said Father Paul, and he preached Jesus and the Resurrection, while Laurence sat on the ground and said nothing.

"I have heard the words of the father," said the old heathen, when he had done, "and they are good words; but there is much that I cannot understand. If these things are so, why have the white people left us so long without telling? And why are the white

people, for the most part, men of no religion at all or of none that we can see? Thou art not as the others, I know; but I will join the spirits of my people, wherever they be, since thou hast come late, my father."

Father Paul answered him, but it was hard. He felt old as he answered. He wished, as he had wished often before in his simple way (and he was ashamed a little as he wished) that he had lived in other days, when he might have travelled, like Loyola, where others had not been, and the world, if wilder, was a simpler place. So at length they prayed together—and it was significant that he said the well-known prayer and few others, I think—and slept.

In the morning he was awakened by voices, and, hearing a word or two, he went out to see. There was a man at the door with a smoking horse, and Sethlare was talking to him—a changed Sethlare. He was very angry, and he poured his anger out on Father Paul when he appeared. "Ha, father!" said he, "See this man! He has a child, a girl, the light of his eyes, and she has been stolen. But yesterday she went to fetch water, and did not return, but a herd-boy saw her seized by the boys of the white man, Gunning, at the store. She was seized; but she went with them easily, father, because her heart had been bought by the white man's gold. Mothlape has feared it for many days. And now it has come to pass, and he has come to me to find her. What of thy faith, now, missionary, and thy white men? Canst thou help Mothlape? But I, I can; I, Sethlare, the doctor."

There was a great scene, and Father Paul won this much at least, that there was no bone-throwing that day, and that they all set out for the store. Gunning saw them coming—a strange party, Sethlare on foot, Mothlape on his horse, and the father and his boy

behind, with their pack and their old-fashioned air. He ignored the natives and held out his hand to Father Paul. "Good day, father," said he, "why did you not come last night? We expected you."

"I stayed with Sethlare in his hut," said the priest, "and—I must say it, Gunning—he has come with this native and a strange story this morning. They accuse you of taking this man's girl. Is it true?"

Gunning stood there in the sunlight, a tall, healthy figure of a man, and looked at them. Then he flipped his leg with his sjambok, and laughed nastily. "Well, Father Paul, you are licensed, I suppose, but don't do it again. Of course I know nothing of this business, and as for that damned old nigger—begging your pardon for the language, but I can't help it—if he comes yelping round again I'll skin him for it."

Well, of course there was a lot more talk, but there were no witnesses, and, as often before, nothing could be done either way. Gunning's boys swore they had never been off the store the day before, and Mothlape had not his witnesses with him. So it went on, Gunning laughing now uproariously in the sunlight, until Sethlare stepped forward and silenced them all by the look on his face. "White man," he said, "thou art great and cunning, but this time maybe thou hast gone too far. I will throw the bones and find the girl, and if thou hast hidden her, I will curse thee as I do not often curse, and thou shalt die." And he was gone before anyone could say anything.

Gunning yelled something after him in Zulu, which Father Paul did not know; but it shows, he thinks, where Sethlare came from; and they went into the house. Relations were a little strained, I fancy. The old priest was too well known and respected for Gunning to say much; but at the same time Father Paul knew that he was not wanted, and he made an excuse to

leave the store early next day. But that night the climax came. They were at supper when Gunning's great retriever leaped to his feet growling. Gunning broke off his talk to look at him, and then they heard the voice outside. Gunning's boy threw open the door, which opened straight from the hut to the veld, and the retriever ran out. "Go for him! Good dog!" said Gunning; but the dog ran a little way, howled, and ran back instead. "Funny," said Gunning. "Let's go and see." He and Father Paul went out at that, and this is what they saw. Sethlare stood in the moonlight thirty yards away. He was nearly naked, and held a huge stick in his hand. He was mouthing words in Zulu at a great rate, and waving his hand, but when the two appeared he changed to Sesuto, and his voice rang clear.

"Liar and betrayer," he said, "thy doom is on thee at last. I curse thee; I, Sethlare, I set my curse upon thee. Thirty days shalt thou live, and then the incurable shall strike thee down. They shall bear thee hence on neither horse nor cart nor wagon, and thou shalt die among strangers in a strange land."

Gunning leapt for his sjambok; but Father Paul blocked his way, and when he got through, Sethlare was gone. He came in after a vain hunt, and he and the priest spent a strange evening. He vowed again that he had not touched the girl, and they dismissed the subject. At breakfast Father Paul saw that he had been drinking; but he said nothing, and left early. I think the old man's heart had never been heavier, and I don't believe he is certain to this day whether he did right to go.

He was five weeks on trek, and then dropped down a pass into Natal to see another priest whose cure lay in a small township where decent roads began. They had a lot to say to each other, and it was not

until they had finished the commoner subjects that his friend broke a silence by asking :

“ Did you ever meet a man called Gunning in the mountains, Paul ? He had a store somewhere up your way, I think.”

“ Yes,” said Father Paul, “ I did ; what of him ? ”

“ Well, it’s one of the strangest and most terrible things I’ve heard,” said the other. “ But three days ago now they brought him down here and took him on in a motor-car to Maritzburg. He fell ill three or four weeks ago, and it turned out to be a malignant cancer. I don’t know how they got him down the pass, but they took him on a special car for operation at Maritzburg Hospital. I heard to-day that they operated, but could do nothing. They’re sending him home to his friends, but they doubt if he’ll live to get there.”

He did not. He was dying at Madeira, and they put him on shore in the hospital there. There he died—among strangers. Father Paul told me the story as we stood by the grave, the last time I came out.

In Loving Memory
of

GEORGE HENRY GUNNING
Born 29th September, 1877
Died 30th November, 1910
R.I.P.

it said.

“ Well, but what do you think ? ” I asked.

“ There are some things,” Father Paul said slowly, “ that are best left to God.”

CHAPTER X

MICHAEL ARCHANGEL

HUBERT reined up his horse and looked around. North, south, east and west were mountains, jagged and bare, with a certain majesty in their barrenness which had entered deep into his soul and left him content. But he was not so content as usual just now. The little mountain trail that they had been following all day, scarce a couple of feet wide, and rough at that, ran forlornly down hill behind him, descended still more steeply to a hidden stream (cut, as if with a monstrous knife, out of the hillside), and ascended steeply opposite. Coming slowly down it to the stream were: first, a native on a white pony, which limped; secondly, a heavily laden pack-horse which walked with its head down; and thirdly, a boy on another pony, which looked, perhaps, the freshest of the lot, but was obviously tired at that. Hubert glanced back at them, and then looked ahead. The road in that direction continued to run uphill for a mile or so, and then disappeared over a crest. There was not much comfort there. He looked at his watch; it was half-past four; then at the sky for the hundredth time, and sighed. It was white with hurrying clouds; already small white flakes were floating down through the air; it must snow heavily soon.

"It's no good," he said aloud to nobody; "we can never make the camp to-night. The only thing is to find a village. Perhaps Edwin knows one." Then to his horse: "All right, old man. You shan't try to

keep 'em at it any longer. We'll knock off here, or at the next hut."

A minute later the weary cavalcade was within hail.

"How far to the camp, Edwin?" sang out Hubert.

The boy on the white horse said something which Hubert could not catch.

"What?" he called.

"He says it is over those far hills ahead, father," answered the boy behind.

"Over the far hills!" cried Hubert. "Good heavens, as far as that! Well, we're done, that's all. We can't do it to-night. Are there any houses near?"

The party, which had now come up, visibly brightened.

"The men in the last village said we must sleep in the houses over this hill, father," said Edwin. "If the father will ride on, he will see them."

"If you hadn't wasted your time in every village we might have made the camp, you rascal," Hubert said irritably. "However, come on now. It'll snow in half an hour, and we shall be done then. Come on."

He shook his reins, and the patient ponies set off again. It was already horribly cold, and as they reached the crest a keen wind seemed to bite clean through them. Hubert pulled his coat tighter, and tried to forget how hungry and dirty he was. Edwin got a canter of some sort out of his lame pony, and came up on the right. He pointed with his sjambok to a cluster of huts on the spur below, which seemed to stand alone in the desolation. "The father must sleep there," he said.

"The father could sleep anywhere," said Hubert, smiling. "Come on."

The whole party pushed on at a shuffling kind of trot, and rode up in a few minutes to the biggest hut of the group. Here Hubert fell back a little, and sat

silent on his horse, while Edwin bargained in the vernacular. He smiled inwardly, even in the cold, at the strangeness of it all. He was unshaven and horribly dirty, but he knew there would not be much washing that night. Water to make the tea was as much as they could hope for. He glanced at the huddled ponies, and at Edwin, in his tasselled knitted cap, his old riding breeches and his blanket, talking rapidly to a tall native in more blankets, who leaned against the reed fence and looked at him indifferently. The white man was of no particular importance here ! Then he took in the surroundings : the stone kraal full of beasts, which lowed occasionally as the wind blew gustily ; the earth, bare till the stones and rough grass began ; the pile of dung-fuel in front of the beehive hut ; and the sounds of talk which drifted out with the coarse smoke from the clay archway of the low door. But Edwin was speaking :

“ This man says we can sleep in that house down there, father,” said he, pointing to a hut a hundred yards below.

“ Thank him, Edwin,” said Hubert, “ and let’s get down there.”

At the entrance they all got off. Hubert’s boy began to take the saddlery off the tired horses, and Edwin to knee-halter them. Hubert made for the door, and went in. At first he could see nothing in the gathering dark but the flickering flame of the dung-fire, but soon he made out a man who sat behind weaving grass-rope, a woman stoically grinding native tobacco, a couple of children asleep on a pile of evil-smelling sheepskins, and a number of pots and bales that looked as if they had come from the last word in old-clothes shops. The pungent smoke he was more or less used to, and with a greeting he went forward to the fire. The man pushed aside his grass

to make a place, and went on with his work without a word. Hubert smiled to himself, and prepared for anything. Anyhow, he thought, nothing much mattered so long as they were out of the cold and the snow.

Hubert had once been vicar of a quite fashionable church in London, and what his people would have thought of him that night I do not know. He was perfectly right: there was no water to wash in, as it all came from a stream down the hill, and it was far too cold for anyone to venture out in the blizzard to get it. Besides, he would have been as dirty five minutes afterwards, and I doubt if he would have ever got warm again. So they made a cheerful party round the fire—he and his boys and the man, for the woman and the children had gone to their own place. He was lavish that night, and gave Edwin and the boy one tin of sardines, while he and the man had the other. There was plenty of bread, too, and Hubert had the last of the marmalade, while the tea was hot and sweet and good, even if there was no milk. So they sat on the sheepskins in the smoke, and Hubert smoked hard himself to make another atmosphere in his immediate neighbourhood. Odd snowflakes drifted in through a hole in the roof and through the meagre reeds that made a door. Occasionally Hubert or one of the others would put on some more dried dung, and occasionally they passed the mug of tea round again. The boys talked mostly of the day's journey and of the ponies; Hubert amused himself and them by learning a few more words in the native; then he said his office by the light of a candle, and then night prayers for them all. Then the man spread a big oxhide kaross on the floor, and piled the sheepskins for a long pillow. Each took off his boots, and Hubert his collar, and then each rolled in his blankets on the kaross.

The priest was asleep in five minutes. He told me he remembered thinking how nothing really matters except warmth and food ; and that was all.

Once in the night he half awoke when a sheep tried to force his way in, and the man got up to turn him out. Hubert hardly noticed it then, but he was sorry when he found the poor beast frozen outside in the morning.

Oh, that morning ! The wind was like a knife, and the air was full of sleet, though there was not much of it because the wind was too strong. The boy, Ben, was awake first, and got the fire going, and Edwin disappeared, second, out of the door to look for the horses. It was impossible to say Mass, so Hubert had some tea and some bread, and then put his nose outside to look for Edwin. He was an hour in coming, and then he reported that two of the horses were missing. There followed two terrible hours, in which all three of them took it in turns to ride Ben's horse in a fruitless effort to find the missing ponies. Hubert made an excursion to the river, and thought he would never get back, and just as Edwin got in from an equally fruitless attempt up the hill—and had to sit by the fire and get himself thawed out—Michael came in.

He wasn't Michael then, but his appearance was as fortunate as his heavenly namesake-to-be would have been. He was a big trooper of the B.M.P., and he came in out of the snow as cheerfully as possible.

"Greeting, father," said he in the native. "The sergeant heard thou wast coming, and when thou didst not arrive last night, he sent me to look for thee this morning."

"Greeting," said Hubert. "I am very pleased to see thee. Two of our horses are lost, and we don't know the road to the camp. And I am hungry," he added.

The big trooper took charge of the situation. "Dost thou know the road to camp?" he asked the man of the hut, and when he found that he did, marshalled his forces admirably.

"Then do thou take the father on the good horse that is left to the camp; Ben, do thou stay here with the luggage; and Edwin, come thou with me for the horses. Do not fear, father, but ride in and eat and be warm; it is only one hour away. We will find thy horses."

Except that the one hour was two, it turned out as he said, and that was how Hubert met Michael. The big trooper acted orderly to him while he stayed among the Christians near the camp, and when he set out back over the mountains to his flock on the plains, the sergeant sent the trooper as guide. The return journey, everyone well rested with a week in camp, was a simple business, the more so as, with the quick change of the country, the snow had given place to the sun, and the sky was as blue over the hills as it is over the Italian lakes. In camp Hubert found that the trooper was a catechumen whose work had given him little time for learning, and on the way the priest finished his preparation for baptism. I should like to have seen the party. They rode in single file up and down and in and out, the guide first and the father second, and Hubert would say:

"Who gave you that name?"

Back would come the answer, stumbling at first:

"My godfathers and godmother in my baptism, wherein I was made a child of God...."—but he was not made yet.

Or, "Blessed be God," the priest would call.

"Blessed be God," responded the guide.

"Blessed be His Holy Name," shouted the priest, whose horse had fallen a little behind.

“Blessed be His Holy Name,” came the answer, and so on.

Each night Ben picketed the horses, and then cooked the chops; the big trooper collected fuel and then took over the pitching of the tents where Hubert had left them; and Hubert, thereafter, said his office. Round the fire they talked, and wound up with the night prayers, and among them always, since one believes in angels and devils in the wilds and on mission:

“Holy Michael, Archangel, Prince of the heavenly host, be thou our safeguard against the snares and assaults of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and, do thou, Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust down to hell Satan and all wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls.”

Hubert said it also, with the Divine Praises, after the morning's Mass on the nearest big flat rock, and Napo (for that was the trooper's native name) used to say it after him. He seemed to think it a suitable devotion for the Mounted Police. Anyhow, when one day they rode into the first out-station of the plains, whence the guide was to turn back in the morning, Hubert asked:

“Thou believest in God and His Holy Church, with all thy heart, Napo?”

“Yes, father,” said the catechumen.

“Then will I baptize thee to-morrow before Mass, if thou art willing,” said the priest.

“I should be very grateful to my father if he would do this for me,” answered Napo.

“And what name wouldst thou like to be baptized by, Napo,” went on Hubert.

“If the father is willing, I would be called Michael, that the Prince may protect me, my father.”

So Napo was washed, and received into Christ's

flock by the name of the Archangel in the little priest's hut (for the church was not yet finished) that very next day ; and the first incident was closed.

Now so far there is nothing out of the common in this story, but in the rest of it there is. Hubert told it me in that same little hut one night when we were travelling together, and he told it me because I had asked him why he had dedicated the mud and reed church to St. Michael Archangel.

" I'll tell you," he said ; " but come here a moment and look first."

I went to the door obediently, and looked. The hut commands the view of a long valley with a river at the foot of it, and at its head the road winds between great rocks that overhang and almost block it. Behind the hut, however, a little path runs up the mountains and disappears over its crest.

" Do you see those two paths ? " said Hubert, pointing them out.

" Yes," said I.

" Well," said he, " those are the two ways to Rambolla where is the camp that I reached in the storm the day I first met Michael—you know the story." I nodded. " It's three days' possible journey by each," he went on, " but the valley road is easier, though longer, and I usually go that way and take four days over it. And now come in again, and I will tell you the reason why this church is the church of St. Michael Archangel.

" Last season, two years after I had baptized Michael it was, I was up here on my way to Rampolla. The church was nearly finished then, and we were wondering what to call it. In the morning I said Mass at the mud altar, and cleared away all the ornaments afterwards as the roof was not on, and Michael served me, as he always liked to do if he was at the station when

I visited it. Then I had my breakfast, and set out, by the valley road, for Rampolla. Michael was not coming as I knew the way well by then, and he was on duty at the camp. It was a fine, bright morning after rain, and we were all of us very cheerful.

“ Well, we had got about an hour’s ride down that valley, when I heard a shout behind. I turned to see who it could be, and saw a man riding headlong down the road after us. At that distance I could not make out his figure, but my boy, with his keen native eyes, said, ‘ It is Michael.’

“ ‘ What can he want ? ’ I said. “ ‘ I suppose I must have left something behind. Did you put everything in, Ben ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, father,’ he said, ‘ I am sure I did,’

“ ‘ Well, then,’ said I, ‘ let’s wait for Michael.’

“ His horse brought him quickly up to us, and sure enough Michael got off. ‘ The father must forgive me,’ he said, ‘ but he must not travel this road.’

“ ‘ Why ever not, Michael ? ’ said I.

“ ‘ The father must not travel by this road,’ he reiterated.

“ ‘ But nonsense, Michael,’ I said. ‘ Why ever not ? It’s much better, and I have plenty of time, and besides, you agreed this very morning that it would be good for me to go this way,’

“ ‘ The father must forgive me,’ said he, ‘ but he must not travel this road.’

“ By this time I was fairly angry. ‘ But why not, man ? ’ I argued. ‘ Is it bad, or is there trouble with the natives ? Tell me.’

“ ‘ It is none of these things, father,’ said he, ‘ but the father must not travel by it.’

“ ‘ Good heavens ! ’ I fear I said, ‘ what rubbish. Get on, Ben. Good-bye, Michael, I am going.’ And I shook up Alec’s reins.

“ Then Michael took a step forward, and seized my bridle. ‘ Stop, my father,’ he said, ‘ and I will tell you.’ ”

“ ‘ Well, tell me,’ I said, ‘ and I warn you, if it is not a good reason, I shall be very angry.’ ”

“ Michael shifted my bridle to his other hand, and pushed his hat back on his head in a kind of nervous way he has.

“ ‘ The father must not be angry,’ he said, ‘ but just now, as I came out of the hut which I had been cleaning, I looked down the valley after the horses. And then I saw, standing over the valley, Michael the Archangel, with his sword drawn in his hand.’ ”

“ I was utterly amazed. He said it quite simply, just as I have told you. I could not say a word for a minute, and then I asked, ‘ What was he like ? ’ ”

“ It was the man’s description, I think, that made me believe his vision. ‘ He was *black*, father,’ said Michael, ‘ and he was very tall. His feet stood above the river, and his head was in the clouds. I could not see the tops of his wings, for they met above his head. He was clothed only in brightness, and his sword pointed towards the road. The father must not travel this way.’ ”

“ Well, that’s all of it. He was the first native I had ever met who believed he had seen an angel, and that was entirely his own description. As for me, I turned back ; anyway I don’t think my boys would have gone on. And they were right. An hour later a party passed down the same way—an Indian storekeeper and two boys—and Michael let them go. He told me afterwards that he had never imagined that the warning was more than a personal one for me. Anyhow, say what you will, as that party passed beneath the rocks at the head of the valley, just where the path overhangs the stream, there was a small landslip, caused, they say, by the tread of the horses on stones

loosened by rain, and the whole path broke away. Two were killed outright, and the third injured. I heard it as I came back, and went to see the place. There was no doubt that the rocks had been loosened by natural causes to such an extent that the first persons to pass after the loosening had become critical, had paid the penalty that this land of rocks and mountains exacts from time to time."

Hubert finished. "So you called the church St. Michael?" I said.

"St. Michael Archangel," said he.

"Well," said I, "I don't know much about these things, but I think it was the least you could do."

CHAPTER XI

THE IRON BRACELET

THEY hadn't seen each other for ten years, not since the one got a Government job on a convict island in the Malays, and the other sailed for East Africa under the auspices of a Missionary Society, which gave him his keep and £20 a year in return for his services. Ten years before they had rowed three and four respectively in a college boat which got its oars in a memorable May, and parted, after the Bump Supper, under the moon in the First Court. Riley had left next morning for Scotland before Enderby was out of bed, and Enderby had sailed for Mombasa while Riley was still in the North.

They met in Piccadilly Circus, outside the Criterion, where, within an area about the size of Riley's Malay island, one meets everybody if one waits long enough. Enderby had landed the day before in a suit of moth-eaten grey flannels and a sun helmet, and Riley had spent most of his ten years in a shirt and cotton drill, while Singapore had been the best in the shape of a giddy metropolis that either had seen in the decade. But twenty-four hours had wiped most of it out. They had assumed London clothes and dropped into London manners as if they had never been out of Town. Yet each heard that the other had come from the ends of the Empire with a *sang-froid* that is only the possession of men of their sort.

They found that neither had many friends in Town, so they dined together that night in a new palace

of a restaurant that had been Exeter Hall when they were last in England, and went to a theatre together afterwards. Next day Riley introduced Enderby to the mysteries of the Chinese eating-house in the Circus, and fixed up a visit to Cambridge for the week-end. Enderby was host at the Union their first night, and by that time they were fairly intimate again. Immediate recognition by the amazing Union authorities seemed to have rolled back the years, and by the time they had reached the coffee they felt they could talk freely.

Enderby passed the sugar, and in doing so Riley caught sight of a curious iron chain bracelet on the other's arm. "What's that?" he asked.

"Oh, just a native bracelet that was given me on the slopes of Kilimanjaro," said Enderby, "of no value, except to me."

"Let's see it," said Riley.

Enderby stretched out his arm again. The bracelet was a roughly made chain of wrought iron, and it had, as pendant, a circular piece of metal, pierced with a hole, which might have been the shank of an old button. Riley twisted it curiously for a moment or two, and then asked: "Why do you wear it?"

"Because of the way I came to get it, and because I was asked to do so," explained Enderby.

"A yarn, is it?" asked the other.

"Well," said Enderby, "it is a yarn, of course, but I don't know that you would think much of it. Also, it is not easy to tell. The value lies behind, if you understand me. I think it's a loose sheet out of the Acts of the Apostles, but you would probably place it in some other category."

"Anyway you arouse my curiosity," said Riley, "Tell it me and let me see. I'll respect your opinion at least."

Enderby looked at him a moment or two before replying. Then he said, smiling: "You know that yarn of the Yankee who could not see much in the pictures of Botticelli, and of the old guide who told him that he and not the picture was on trial? Well, if I tell you the story, in my mind; anyway, I shall put you in much the same position. But you can have it if you like."

"Good," said Riley, "I'll take the risks."

So Enderby lit a cigarette, pulled at it once or twice in silence, and then began:

"It happened about a year ago," he said. "I had had a bout of fever, nastier than usual, and cleared off to the mainland for a change. I ought by custom to have spent my month on one of our up-country mission-stations, lovely enough in all conscience, especially one which stands on a hill, approached by an avenue of orange trees, and surrounded by a tropical stream of clear water, and huge rocks, and thick reeds that the weaver birds love. But I was always rather keen on getting about, and so I put a week in there, and then caught the German mail train that used to run to a place called Arusha, a couple of hundred miles or so inland. It was a wonderful run. The line wanders in and out of the Usambara hills, through banana and rubber forests, till it reaches the Usambara mountain itself, which is too big to do anything else with but skirt. The stations are just a collection of iron-roofed huts, but each one is thronged by natives, of tribes which vary as one gets inland. Then you skirt the Para Mountains which rise abruptly off the great plain of the Masai Reserve, and the Masai themselves are visible at each halt. They come on to the platforms with their spears, smelling for half a mile of train-oil, and wearing a tattered goatskin apiece (which just about covers their shoulders) for decency. I remember

I got a good snap-shot of a group of Masai married women, who wear enormous broad metal hoops round their necks—ten or a dozen to a woman—and not much else. We got to Arusha about midnight, and were dumped out on to a stretch of bare earth littered with railway refuse and crowded with semi-naked savages all wanting to carry your bag. I had only a small suit case with me, and some ruffians collared it and led me off to the hotel.

“That was a queer business, I can tell you. There was no moon and no road, and we just wandered, seemingly hopelessly, till a light glimmered in the distance. It turned out to be a half-open door. I knocked, and who do you think opened it? A girl, white, thin silk, low-cut blouse, necklace and rings complete, as if she had stepped straight out of a Berlin hotel! I asked in English for a room, and she replied, in German, that she didn't speak English. I know just about enough German to understand that. Things began to look desperate till I tried her in Swahili, and then she beamed all over and said they were hopelessly full up. I said I was profoundly sorry, but that I must sleep there, and I sent her for the boss. While she was away I tried strategy, paid off my Masai, and flung my bag inside the door. Then the boss appeared, talking good English, and he was equally emphatic that he could do nothing. However, at last, with many apologies, he said he could manage something for the night, at a push, and led the way across a big yard to a long, low building built as a big store room. He opened the door and went in, and held his candle high up inside to show me things. It was quite empty, and so big that I could only just make out two old abandoned beds, one in each of the far corners. It was a case of needs must, and so I accepted; and presently I was alone in that great barrack of a

place, with a tiny island of light, thrown from a single candle, in a sea of gloom. I turned in somehow, and you can guess how I slept when I tell you that next morning I found a man in the other bed who had been through a like business without my hearing a word !

“ He turned out to be a German Lutheran missionary, not a bad sort, and over our sausage breakfast he put me up to an itinerary. First we walked the entire day to his station—a regular German farmstead, with the grandparents and the grandchildren all complete. I remember a flaming bed of nasturtiums in the front of the house which came like a vivid reminder of home, a reminder one needed since the Mission itself was high up on foothills covered with banana forests and surrounded by the bee-hive huts of Wachaka natives. On the way, however, he would talk theology, and as we had mostly to use the Swahili, it was very profitless and I was hopelessly bored. However, I slept there that night, and set off, next morning, with two Lutheran sisters for another station, another day’s journey away. Those two women were an experience. They dressed in very short skirts and hideous home-made woollen stockings and thick, clumsy boots, but they were kindly enough, and we shared our meals, and chatted as well as we could, till night found us at their Mission. Next morning I saw the snow-crowned head of the mountain for the first time ; at sunrise, it was, and as the sun cleared the upper mists, that great rounded back of glistening white swam out above the fleecy clouds into the light like a sudden vision from another land. I resolved then and there to get as near to that snow-line as I could, and set out after breakfast for the next stage.

“ All day I, and the boy they had lent me, tramped on and up. The road wound under masses of tropical

creeper in the valleys, through thick banana brakes on the level, and then climbed to the higher ground where coarse bracken and heath grew. By night we reached a Catholic monastery, and the good fathers put me up for a day or two; and then I was off again to one of those queer places one finds in the wilds.

“Years before a German professor of psychology had come out to German East Africa on a visit for his health. He had always had a love of mountaineering, and was at once amazed by the surprising splendour of Kilimanjaro, till then unclimbed. He had been first on the summit, and then, as if fascinated, he had given his life to the mountain. He built an hotel about 8,000 feet up—a big, sprawling bungalow of a building, set in glorious gardens, where everything, tropical and temperate, seemed to grow; and he had studied the great snow-crowned mass until he knew the best paths and the best times and every secret of the mountain. He trained native guides, erected huts at easy stages, and sat down there, on the skirts of the monster, like some guardian of secret mysteries. The fame of him reached to Germany, I suppose; anyway, little parties came out from time to time and climbed under his supervision. It was a strange place. I couldn't help feeling that there was a curious kind of paganism about it all. The mountain was all one talked about; the boys about the place were raw heathen; and I had a sense as if the centuries had rolled back and the gods had come into their own again. Every evening, when the dying sun stained that white crest with crimson, we gathered as if to worship it. Anyway, no one worshipped much else.

“Well, I found I had hit a bad season, when ascents were nearly impossible, and also that I had not enough time left for the attempt. My host saw my disappointment; and he told me how, by means of an early start and

a long climb, I might cross a high spur on my way back which would land me on the rocky plateau from which the snow-head rises. One cannot make the summit that way, but one can see the glory of it. Feeling something like a Moses on a Pisgah, I set out.

"I shall never forget that day. First I passed a few villages of entirely savage heathen folk, and then I seemed to leave all habitations as I climbed up. The trees thinned; even the belt of bush gave way; and at last I was out on a rocky spur which hid any further view from me. I climbed slowly up it, passed the crest, and then saw what I had come so far to see.

"Before me lay a mile or two of stony ground and rough grass, and then, seemingly very near in that clear air, there rose sharply and wonderfully three or four thousand feet of untrodden snow, gleaming in the sun, silent, pure, against the blue. Then I turned and looked below. Far, far beneath lay the great plain, stretching unbroken to the horizon. The glass showed the villages like tiny ant-hills, and the thin silver of rivers; and intense silence brooded over all. I sat down to gaze and think."

Enderby paused a moment, fingering a wineglass nervously.

"I don't think I can tell you all I thought, Riley," he said at last, "but it was a little like this. I seemed to be seeing the world as God must see it from the pure height of Heaven, and I thought how it had looked to Him from the Cross, and that it seemed so sorrowfully *unclaimed*.....; but then I heard a noise behind me.

"I turned, to see an old native leaning on a stick, a queer old savage of a chap, wearing positively nothing but a goatskin, and behind him a dozen or so of goats busy at the rough grass. I had a little pocket camera with me, and I whipped it out for a photograph. At the click of the shutter he dropped his stick and covered

his face with his hands in fear. At that I got up and went towards him, saying in Swahili: 'Don't be afraid; I won't hurt you.' He muttered something about the Evil Eye, so I said: 'I am only taking a picture; it won't hurt you; come and see the picture-box,' or rubbish of that sort. He came near at that and sat down beside me. It's jolly hard to explain the art of photography in the native, but I tried, and was at least rewarded by his losing all sense of fear.

" 'Where do you live?' I asked.

"He pointed to a tiny hut a good way down the slope (which I had overlooked) and added that he lived alone with his wife.

" 'What do you do for a living up here?' I said.

"He replied that he kept goats and grew bananas, and apparently he wanted no more. And then he looked at me curiously and asked:

" 'What does the Master do up here?'

" 'I came to see the mountain,' I said.

" 'Is the Master a servant of the Government, then?' he asked.

" 'No,' said I.

" 'What is the Master then?' he persisted.

"I don't know quite why I used exactly the words that I did but I answered at once: 'A priest of Jesus Christ.' It comes easier in the native.

"And then the strange thing happened. The old chap's eyes fairly glistened. He jumped to his feet, dropped on his knees, and said 'The father is a priest. I am a child of Jesus. Bless me in His Name!'

"I was so amazed that I hardly knew what to say, but I blessed him and we talked. He had a simple faith, that old savage Presently I said I must go, and then he seized his own left wrist and tugged off something. Catching my hand he forced it on—that iron bracelet. 'Father,' he said, in words I can

hardly translate, 'I have little to give, but wear this from me. And when the father stands at the altar and feels it, perhaps even in his own land, let him remember me and pray for me and my country. And let him show it to people that they may remember too.'

"I thanked him and came away. I don't mind telling you that I stumbled down that bit of hill.... I'll tell you what I thought. Nineteen hundred years ago they had taken our Lord and hung Him up on a hill that His Name might be a byword and a hissing, and yet here on a hill beyond the borders of the world, and unknown a score of years ago, an old savage could be found to drop on his knees at the mention of that Name. Tell me, Riley, is there any other name in Heaven or in Earth that can do that? And there hummed a text through my mind all the way down: 'He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.' . . .

"There! I'm sorry; it's a queer yarn for a dinner-table talk, but you asked, you know."

That night Riley met an old chum in the street, a don now, who had been up with him. He went with him to his rooms, and a few more came in, and they had rather a good time. "By the way," he said, as he got up to go, "do you remember Enderby of ours? He's up too. Met him in Piccadilly by chance the other day. Been knocking around in Africa for ten years."

"Really?" said his host. "Yes, I remember him. A decent man he was, but rather queer. What's he like now?"

"Oh, all right—a good sort; rather queer, though, still," said Riley.

CHAPTER XII

"SO AS BY FIRE"

THE "Pevensey Castle" had been five days in the harbour of Kilindini, and her people were contemplating two more with anything but indifference. There is a moment when Kilindini looks like Paradise. After the last date-palms of Port Suez, the traveller East has nothing before him but the harsh, brown deserts and mountains of Egypt, Sinai, Aden and Somaliland (except for some sweltering days at sea), until they let the anchor go in the long, narrow creek, and he rushes up on deck to see the white beach, the green cocoanuts and the grey baobabs of Mombasa Island, set mostly in a glowing sun under a fairy sky. Then he trolleys up to the town under his first bananas and mangoes, and takes ices at the big hotel with the purple bougainvillias and creamy-white frangipannies opposite. Then he sees his first Swahili, and gets an introduction to the freedom of East Africa. And it is all glorious—until the coaling begins, and the small island is fairly done, and there is nothing for it but to sit in a deck-chair and try not to remember the price of iced drinks.

Hugh Everton had tired of it almost as soon as the train had borne north to Nairobi the greater number of the "Pevensey's" people with whom the voyage had been spent so easily, and perforce he had been thrown a little into the company of old Brooke, who, after all, was bound for the same destination and had been that way before. Hugh was going to superintend other people planting cocoanuts in Zanzibar; and he regarded the prospect with a certain complacency,

a little marred just now by his first experience of tropical heat, African mosquitoes, and the fleeting nature of colonial friendships. Brooke had looked after black men's souls for an unknown period, and appeared to wish to do so to the end, with a queer lack of enthusiasm, and yet with a certain determinedness which rather bewildered the other. Everton would have told you that he was a "churchman," and that of course Missions were "all right," but all the missionaries he had known had been either (as he sized them up) young fools, or men seemingly inspired with an enthusiasm astonishingly remote from his own outlook on life. Yet old Brooke was neither the one nor the other. Sitting side by side with him in a deck-chair, he was lazily contemplating that fact just now.

A little motor-boat ran fussily out from the quay, and Hugh watched it idly round the point. Then he ventured on a remark.

"Your chaps always seem pretty keen when they come out. Do they keep it up, Mr. Brooke?"

The other waited till the noise of the donkey-engines had died down for a minute, and then said with a smile:

"So you're tired of East Africa already, are you?" Hugh started. "What do you mean?" he said.

"Oh, only that I guessed your train of thought! I remember feeling just the same. First it's like Robinson Crusoe come to life, and then one gets sick of the heat and flies and damp, and rather wants a bit of the breeze over a Yorkshire moor—if one's from Yorkshire!"

Hugh laughed. "I was wanting half an hour in the Solent," he said. "But I guess it's the same thing. However, do your chaps get tired, that's what I asked; and what happens if they do?"

"Some of them go to the devil," said old Brooke simply.

"Oh, I say," said Hugh, leaning forward, "you don't mean that?"

"I do, if you want the truth. Missionaries are not much different from other men, you know, and a good many of them go to him too. Only our fellows go differently—perhaps."

"Have you ever known any to go?" asked Hugh.

"Yes," said the other, and added slowly, "and some come back."

"Tell me," said Hugh.

Brooke shifted a little and looked at him. He took his questioner in, from his Leander tie to his rather neat deck shoes, and he told himself, without conscious expression, that he had seen many others of the same type. Then he glanced out to where the palms thinned on the other bank, visible now as the "Pevensey Castle" swung round on the tide, and then he glanced at his watch. "Very well," he said, "before the dressing bell."

"Young Fraser came out in the 'nineties, and I believe his people had a country vicarage down in Hampshire. He was just the sort we want—trial cap, Harrow before that, I fancy, and quite a decent degree, and he was as keen as could be. He'd gone up keen, I think, and only developed it more definitely up there; and although he wasn't a fool at all, I think he expected street-preaching and hut-to-hut visiting, after a kind of Bermondsey-in-the-Tropics. He was awfully set up, too, with the natives and the country, and he got on with them all right into the bargain. We gave him six months in a big Mission, and then packed him off to an island, with another priest and a couple of laymen. Moshi-Ntumbi, it was. It's a station on the side of a hill among the palms,

and you can look down through them to the sea, while behind, the slope runs up till the wood thins and the bush begins, and at last you come out on a dry summit sown thick with thyme and a little yellow flower the bees love. Fraser used to climb up pretty often at one time. He liked the monkeys in the wood, but most of all the view from the top. Below, stood out plainly the Mission-house and the church, and a hundred yards or so away the native village by the water; and behind, the island lay like a map, with the smoke of a score of villages rising into the blue with every sunset and sunrise. Fraser used to plan a visit to one or another of those villages at every climb, but I don't think he got to more than three or four. You see, at first he was most of the time at the language, and beastly he found it. The Tropics are not the best place to swelter grammar in. Then his fellow-priest got blackwater and they sent him home, and it used to take Fraser an hour to get up the psalms and lessons for Evensong, and even then he didn't understand them. Then the laymen quarrelled, and the Bishop removed one, and Fraser didn't hit it with the other. They hadn't much in common outside of church, and even there it wasn't all smooth sailing. There was a lot to be said for the layman; he talked the language, and Fraser didn't, and yet Fraser had to preach and he wasn't allowed even to try. Not that he wanted to—but he was a stiff critic. Then Fraser had his own ideas about the new school, and if he wasn't a carpenter, at least he was 'priest-in-charge'; and so it went on. But the native work broke him in the end.

“First there was old James, the catechist. James had his own ideas, but they were mostly African and concerned with sitting still and not worrying. To Fraser, James was a heathen who had seen the light

and must now be more than eager to let it in elsewhere ; to James, Fraser was a young white man, wholly inexplicable and always in a hurry. Then Fraser was very sure about a certain boy, Athanasio, who used to help him with his sermons and look after his donkey. He was broken-hearted when Athanasio made a heathen marriage and was entirely untroubled over it. But it was a girl, Mary Kanjai, who finished him.

"Mary was born and bred at Moshi, and used to teach the kiddies in the school. She was nothing much to look at, but as keen as anything, and you would find her before the altar every night with a nipper or two, teaching them to say their prayers. Fraser wrote home about her, and he used to say that a few like that were the hope of the race. (That was when he found that the heathen did not respond in crowds to his preaching.) And then, one night of a full moon, while he sat on his verandah getting up a lesson for next day, his boy, Yusuf, broke in on him excitedly.

" ' Padre,' he said, ' there's a big dance over at Pani-Samaki, and Mary's gone to it ! '

" ' What sort of a dance ? ' said Fraser, in terror of the truth.

" ' A bad, bad, devil dance,' said Yusuf. ' Plenty men drink, and much people dance, and devil come and speak through Mary ! '

" Fraser got up with his face white. It had come at last—the heroic, the real. He would go and rescue the lost sheep. And go he did, Yusuf and he, five miles through the bush, with the fire-flies dancing among the tall grasses, and the moon shining wetly on the high cocoanut fronds. The path gave abruptly on to the shore, and he could see the firelight, five hundred yards away, shining ruddily on an old boat and a disused palm-shelter. At the place, a row of

girls knelt on a raised board and chanted ; a couple of men in devil-masks danced ; and a goat lay, with its body ripped up, between them. Mary was on her knees before it, with her hands buried in it, and she blasphemed through her lips. She blasphemed him, too, when he got there and ordered her in bad Swahili and much agitation to come away, and it was only because he was white and new that he got away alive himself. And he came back to his lonely house with the consciousness of failure on him and the beginnings of a bad fever.

"Simpson nursed him round. Simpson was a Government collector just put in at Moshi; and it was he who introduced Fraser to the whisky. Fraser did not last six months after that. Then he cleared out just before the Bishop came, and went up into the Protectorate. And they wrote him off the books."

Brooke relapsed into silence. Hugh Everton relaxed his hands round his knees and broke it. "By Jove," he said, "I never guessed it might be like that."

"No," said Brooke. "You wouldn't."

"But," said Everton, "are Missions a failure, then? What do you mean? Why do you go on with it?"

The boys unloading iron rails alongside for the Uganda Extension must have settled a score or more into the lighter before Brooke replied. Then he said slowly: "Do you want to know?"

"Yes," said the other, "rather."

"Well, I'll tell you what happened to Fraser, if you like," said the old, weather-tanned priest. "It's a queer sort of yarn, but it illustrates both your questions."

"About two years after that, a couple of hunters out from Nairobi crossed the German boundary and

began a big shoot on the Kilimanjaro slopes. There was a good deal of elephant there then, and things were pretty rough. About two miles below a place called Marengo, they rounded up a good-sized herd in a little valley with steep sides, where a bit of a waterfall drops a hundred feet or more into a basin among long grass. There wasn't any beating, but the Masai guides led them there, and they had the beasts in a trap, and got several cows and a bull or two each towards evening when the big beasts came to drink. Then they cut out the tusks and the best of the meat, and set out for Marengo, a Ki-chaka village—all of them, white and black together, as excited as they could be. The chief turned out of his hut for them—or they turned him out, really; and then they laid out for an evening of it. The chief's hut was set in a kind of thick aloe fence, and all the enclosure was overgrown with banana trees. The boys made a huge fire outside and spread a table near the fire (for it's cold in the evening on Kilimanjaro) that looked like civilisation almost. Both men meant to do themselves well that night. They hadn't a table-cloth, but there was plenty of whisky and new-roasted corn-cobs, and a banana stew, and some birds they'd knocked over, and the best of the elephant meat. Half way through, they called old Mataka the chief, and gave him whisky and sent him out to find girls to dance. It was a scene that, I can tell you—the red sparks of the fire, the natives clustering round, the girls dancing, the open, dark hut behind with the blankets spread and the mosquito-nets rigged up, and, far behind all, the moon, white on the snows of Kilimanjaro. Then came swift tragedy. The younger of the two white men wanted one of the dancing girls, and she refused. He got up drunkenly and staggered over to her and took her by the arm, and she broke

away. He swore and asked why. She—despite the dancing and the savagery—said she was a Christian; and he—well, he kicked her badly for her pains. They carried her out, and both men contented themselves with others.

“When the sun was well up, the older awoke and drank his coffee, and at that he heard the news. He turned back to the hut and woke the younger.

“‘You’re a cursed fool, Jim,’ he said. ‘That beastly girl you kicked died last night, and now there’ll be the deuce to pay, for as likely as not we shall have a row with the Government.’

“‘Which girl, Charlie?’ said Jim, who hadn’t got his memory back all that much yet.

“‘Why, you fool,’ replied Charlie, ‘that girl who danced and wouldn’t come in because she said she was a Christian. You took Sikujua instead—remember? You’d better go and look at her and give her man fifteen chips (i.e., rupees) and a new knife. And be quick about it; breakfast’s getting cold.’

“Jim, swearing hugely, went out of the enclosure. A few yards away a big native squatted by a doorway, and presently took him in. In the corner lay the girl. She wore a crucifix by a bit of dirty string round her neck.

“‘She my girl, good girl,’ rattled on the native. ‘Worth very much—knew to read, to write. She Mission girl, called Mary, came from far away and live with me. White man pay much money or I make great trouble. He kick her; she die last night—my girl, good girl, Mission people call Mary.’ Jim heard as from a great way off, but there was another woman by the body, and she took up the tale in better English. ‘I Mission girl too,’ she said; ‘Catholic Mission. Mary English Mission, and all last night she have much pain and she say: “I want to make

confession ; why are there none of my priests here ? I big sinner, but very sorry. Never done some wrong, but I want a priest : why none of my priests here ? ” So she die, white man, and you very bad man.’

“ Jim turned without a word and left the hut. He was as white as a piece of paper. Outside, the sun, hot already, made the air flicker over the banana slopes, and glittered on the white head of Kilimanjaro. But Jim saw nothing of it, nor heard Charlie calling. Instead he saw a fire on the beach in the night, and a girl possessed, over a sacrificed goat, and himself vehemently judging and condemning. And as he saw, heedless of the natives and of his companion, he staggered away among the bananas and dropped on his knees. And all the grim tragedy of it smote on his brain : ‘ Why are there none of my priests here ? ’ And there had been—in the next hut ! ”

The voice of old Brooke broke curiously and ceased. Hugh Everton swallowed a little in his throat, and looked out over the blue water to where the “ Pevensey Castle,” in her swing, showed him the white foam on the reef. “ And that’s the answer to more than one of your questions,” said Brooke, after a minute.

Hugh glanced swiftly at him. “ How did you know all that ? ” he asked.

Brooke pulled a pipe out of his pocket and began to pack it. “ Oh ! one hears yarns like that in Africa,” he said evenly.

CHAPTER XIII

STEFANO

ALL the boys had gone to football except Stefano, whom a slightly sprained ankle kept at home that afternoon. He was a well-built lad, a Yao, with remarkably Bantu features that could not be called beautiful, except by such as have the wit to set small store on earthly standards of beauty, and who look instead at the light in the eye and the play of the soul. In Stefano's eyes, then, was a light which was capable of almost transforming his face, and which sometimes made the padre who taught him look at him a moment longer, when he asked him a question in class, than he looked at other boys. Not that the padre quite fathomed those eyes: far from it. They showed a boy who was very much of a boy, and annoyingly keen on mischief, and a boy who had a very considerable intelligence hidden behind them; but there was a look there also which rather baffled the observer. The padre said it was a puzzled look, and probably he was right. Stefano, for all his black skin, was by way of being a bit of a Socrates. He never accepted things at their face value merely, and he was perpetually grappling with the problems of his universe. He was scarcely conscious of grappling with them; he was chiefly conscious, unlike his fellows, that there were inconsistencies in life, even in life as set out by the (obviously) immensely rich and perfectly infallible Mission. It is not really very polite to Stefano, but the padre often said that he looked at you as a very intelligent and affectionate dog

sometimes looks when his master is preparing for a journey, or is in trouble. The dog is aware that the god-like being is disturbed, which, in a god, if one is intelligent enough to think it out, is amazing. So Stefano, with an implicit trust in the system that enmeshed him, was intelligent enough to realise sufficient of the paradoxes of life to be almost perpetually puzzled. . . . But he never *doubted*, you understand.

It was just such a paradox that came his way that afternoon, while he sat in the airy whitewashed schoolroom with its glassless windows, through which the mason-bees hummed every now and again, and the hot air faintly stirred. He had sat down to enjoy an enormous treat to such a boy as he. The padre, a prisoner before a pile of exercise books at the far end of the room, had lent him, at his own inimitable half-bold, half-careless request, a startling production known (I believe) as *The Twentieth Century Atlas*. It was no ordinary atlas. It not merely pictured remote lands in bold colours, which was interesting enough, but it gave further pictures of those same lands in other further colours and markings, with odd little representations below, of, for example, a series of cows, or of ships, or of soldiers, or of coal-blocks, all in ascending sizes. This, then, was one of those mysterious things that Stefano loved. He knew, dimly, that the soldiers, for instance, represented armies; and yet the English soldier in red was the smallest on the page, whereas everybody knew that the armies of the great King were as the trees of the forest for multitude. Stefano never talked of such a thing, but it was strange to him. So was also the page at which he was even now looking.

It represented the world; he knew that (howbeit it was square on the map and flat, although the padre

said it was round); but the world in a variety of colours which seemed to correspond to nothing under the sun. The greater part of Europe and South America, for instance, were red, whereas England and most of Germany were white. Now, why, why in the world? As all Stefano's fifteen years had been lived in German East Africa, he knew exactly how much there was in common between the Germans and the English, and if he had been map-making he would most certainly have not made them both white. He heaved a tremendous sigh.

"What is it, Stefano?" asked the padre, looking up. "Want to go out?"

Stefano grinned and said nothing, which was rather his way.

"Well, what is it then?" the priest persisted, and, glad of a momentary interruption, sauntered down the room.

Stefano promptly turned the page, which was again his way, but the padre knew him, and as promptly turned it back. He was at once confronted with the Harmsworth faith in *The Religions of the World*.

"Oh!" said he, rather spotting a chance, "that's a map of the religions of all the people in the world. The green shows the lands where the people believe in Mohammed, and the black is heathen, and the red is—er—well, is—er—'Katoliki.'"

"Ah!" said Stefano.

"Now, where were you born?" said the padre, an inquiring finger wavering over the page.

"Mataka," said Stefano promptly.

"Exactly," said the triumphant padre, stabbing the page; "that's there, and it's black, you see. Now in your village the people were all heathen, weren't they?"

"No," said Stefano. "Mataka built a mosque in

the time of my father, and all the people hear the Koran now."

"Oh, well, you see, this map was printed before that was known in England," said the slightly less enthusiastic but still painstaking priest. "Look at Zanzibar, now, that's Mohammedan, and you see it's green, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Stefano, not over-convincedly; "but the Great Churches of the Mission and of Roma are there. And what does red mean?"

"Katoliki," said the padre, on surer ground.

"Then what does white mean?" persisted the boy.

"Oh, well," said the priest, "it means Christians that are not Katoliki, you know."

"Why not?" asked Stefano.

"Well, you see," said the lecturer, "they do really love and worship our Lord, but they've forgotten, or not understood, all His Words. They don't listen to the Bishops He put into the world to teach the people. But they really love our Lord," he added lamely.

"Ha!" said Stefano again, and then, with a remembrance of the Friends' Mission in Pemba, seen on a holiday: "Are the other white men in Pemba Christians, then?"

"Yes," said the priest.

"But a boy told me they don't baptise the people," objected Stefano.

"No," said the priest, "they don't" (and began to hanker after the exercise books); "but they do love our Lord, only they think His Words don't—er—quite mean that now."

Stefano sat amazed. "But they don't have a Bishop," he said.

"No," said the priest.

"And they don't go to Mass, and they don't confess their sins for God to speak forgiveness by the priest."

"No," said the priest.

"But are they Christians, then?"

"Yes," said the padre, plunging in up to the neck again. "Yes, Stefano, they are, but, as I told you, they've forgotten the Words of our Lord. He lived a long time ago, you know, and they left the Bishops, and now they don't do these things. You mustn't worry about them. *You* know the Words of our Lord."

"But," said Stefano slowly, "but I don't understand, father; they read the Bible."

"They do, Stefano, but it is as I say," said the priest hopelessly.

"Well," said Stefano, "*I should be afraid.*"

That was the sort of boy he was, and what could you do with him? And there was another side to his character, too, that came out in this way.

One night the padre and the priest-in-charge were sitting on the mosquito-proof baraza, talking after supper. The tree-cricket had a parliament on just outside, and it was not any too easy to talk comfortably, but the two were rather deep over a new book that discussed the philosophy of Nietzsche and one or two other unimportant matters. Suddenly, however, the crickets ceased to sing, and in the silence they heard a cry.

"Hullo," said the padre, "what's that?"

It came again and nearer, a woman's cry, and then the pad-pad of bare feet running. They listened eagerly. Under the baraza the feet stopped, and a man's voice cried up:

"My father, oh, my father, art thou there?"

"Yes," called back the priest-in-charge. "Who is it?"

"It is I, thy son, Wilfridi, and my wife. Come to us quickly, my father; we are bewitched."

The woman's lamentations rang out again at that, and the priests rose hastily and went downstairs.

At the door, the padre saw a strange sight. Against the background of palms that glistened in the white moonlight stood a native man. His left hand gripped the arm of a woman, who crouched on the ground, wrapped up in her *sheeties* and crying monotonously. His right was held rigidly in front of him, and in the clenched fist was a small object.

"Oh, my father," broke out the man the moment the door was opened, "we are here, thy children, and we are bewitched. As Fidesi, my wife, went to the bed but now, she saw beneath it this medicine, a great medicine, my father, by which I shall go mad and kill my wife, and die myself. And even now the madness works in my brain, oh, my father," he added.

At this the woman's cries redoubled, and she tried to pull away her arm. "Peace, woman," said the man roughly but fearfully, "or the spirit will seize upon me."

"What rubbish and foolish talk is this, Wilfridi?" said the elder priest sternly. "Are you not a Christian, and have you not a cross about your neck that you should talk like this? Is not Christ our Lord stronger than Satan? Give me the medicine and go quietly to your home, and in the morning I will come and pray, and no evil thing shall have power over you."

The man mumbled shamefacedly, and pushed his right hand towards the priest, who took from it a curious little bundle. He put it behind his back, and the woman ceased at once to cry.

"Kneel now," he said to them.

The man knelt, and the woman shuffled up on to her knees and made the sign of the Cross.

"Holy Michael Archangel," prayed the priest,

“defend us in the day of battle. Be thou our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, thrust down to Hell, Satan and all wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls.” He added a blessing. The two signed themselves again, and with profuse thanks moved off into the darkness, talking excitedly as they entered the trees. The Englishmen remained in the light of the doorway, and both bent to examine the medicine.

It was a little bundle, tied with a fragment of dirty cloth, and consisting of a few twigs of the cassarina tree bound to a few inches of hard wood.

“I know it,” said the elder. “The medicine-man cuts the wood on a night of the new moon, and the blood of a goat slain in sacrifice is sprinkled over it. See, it is stained on this side. Then you can combine the wood with various leaves for different magics. This one is to separate husband and wife. Some man wants the woman put out of the way, and by this he will cause the man to slay his wife. I’ve known it done too. So much for the power of superstition.”

The younger padre turned it in his hand. “Do they all believe that?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the other, “it’s very widespread I think.”

“Give it me, will you?” asked the first.

“All right,” said the other man, “only lock it up. These things are really best destroyed. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said the other, and turned away, the thing in his hand.

As he crossed the moonlit courtyard, a light in a window opposite attracted him. He hesitated a minute, and then turned in under the cloisters,

climbed a narrow stone stair, and opened a door. Within were a dozen beds, six a side. A big crucifix hung on the bare wall opposite, and the dormitory was lit by a small lamp.

The priest took a few steps in, one hand behind his back. "Asleep yet, Stefano?" he said softly.

A boy stirred on a bed and sat up, his clean, black skin catching the lamplight. "No, father," he said.

"Come here, then," ordered the priest.

Stefano got out of bed, gingerly, and, wrapping his covering blanket round his waist, approached the priest. Two or three others moved a little to watch.

"Stefano," said the priest, "you are a Christian, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the boy, wonderingly.

"Well," said the priest, "then take this," and he thrust his hand holding the medicine towards the boy.

The light fell on it plainly. A boy in bed uttered a cry and drew his blanket over his head. Another sat up hurriedly, and held his hand, with the fingers spread, before his face. Stefano blanched under his black skin, and fell back a pace. A dead silence fell on them all.

"Take it, Stefano," said the priest again.

"It is a medicine which makes madness, oh, my father," whispered Stefano; "I myself have seen it."

"Stefano," said the priest again, "who is stronger, Christ or Satan? Take it into your hand. Does it harm me?"

"The white priest cannot be harmed," said Stefano.

The padre did not reply. He simply stood there and held it out.

The minutes passed. Almost he lost patience, but then the boy before him stirred. Very slowly,

his eyes on the priest, he made a big sign of the Cross, and then, never looking down, he held out his hand. The priest put what he held into it for a moment, and then withdrew his own again.

"God bless you, boy," he said huskily; "get back to bed."

He turned and went out, but Stefano stood a minute. Then he, too, made for his bed. The boy next him rolled farther away, and Stefano got in slowly.

"But I myself have seen it," he muttered half audibly, and again more determinedly, "I myself have seen it."

That was the kind of boy Stefano was; and when the padre gave him, next day, a medal of St. Michael Archangel treading Satan under foot, he thanked him gravely, but never appeared with it, so that the padre concluded that for some reason of his own he would not wear it. That, again, was the kind of boy Stefano was.

The years pass quickly in Africa, and the priest-in-charge was almost startled when Stefano came to him one day and said he wanted to marry the girl his father had chosen, and leave the school.

"But will you not go to Zanzibar to college?" asked the priest. "You are a good boy; we will send you."

"No, my father," said the boy. "I do not wish to be a teacher. My father has chosen a Christian girl, and I like her. We will marry, and live in my father's village."

"But it is twenty miles away, and all heathen!" exclaimed the priest.

"I am sorry," said Stefano, "if it grieves my father, but it is the wish of my people, and I go. I am strong; I will walk in to the Mission very often for my Church, and my wife with me."

There was nothing to stop him, and so it happened. Only the foreboding of the priest-in-charge came to nothing. Stefano was strong and he did walk in. He became one of those curious natives that a little bit vex a missionary's heart. He came to his duties three or four times a year, and fairly often for other things as well, but he said very little and he seemed to progress not at all. But all was straight at the village on the hills, and as his goats increased he became a man of importance there, with his children growing up about him. And all went well till about the middle of August, 1914.

Stefano's village was small and far away, and it was not until about the tenth of the month that a man came in with the news: "The Germans are at war with the English," he said, "and there will be pain in the land."

They discussed it half the night, and in the morning Stefano said:

"I will go to the Mission and see. I was going up for the great day of our Lady, but now I go a little earlier, that is all. And my wife will stay here till I return with the news."

"It's no good thy going," said the man. "The priests have left."

"I do not believe that the priests will leave," said Stefano.

"But I heard on the railway that the Germans had taken them, they and the *bibis*, too. The place is empty. Thou canst not go," said the man.

"Bring me food, woman," said Stefano to his wife. "I go."

But it was as the man had said. As he climbed up the hill under the orange trees, there were no boys in the river below washing their clothes and bathing. The gate of the courtyard gaped open, and it seemed

silent as the grave within. But Stefano went to the priest's room, and called to come in from habit.

"Come in," said a guttural voice, and Stefano was amazed. He stood silently. At that the door was flung open, and there appeared in the entrance an officer in German uniform. "What do you want?" he asked.

"The priest," said Stefano.

"He has gone," said the German. "Where do you come from?"

Stefano told him, and the man looked him up and down a moment. Then he pushed by him and whistled. A native *askari* came running round the corner and saluted. "Take this man and keep him," said the German. "He can go with the levy to-morrow to the rail. That is all."

He turned and went inside, shutting the door. Stefano stared at it. Then he moved away. "Not that way," said the man, "come here."

"I go home," said Stefano simply.

"No you don't," said the *askari* with a broad grin. "You go and fight. The capitani say so. You fight the English now, and have much fun. You can kill, and take women, and you will get much money. Come with me."

Stefano stood silently, then he turned away. In a moment the *askari* had run round him, and Stefano was brought up against a bayonet point. And that was how Stefano became a German *askari*.

They took him down to the railway, and he spent the night with thirty other young men, under lock and key and an armed guard, but he was given plenty to eat and drink. The rest were all heathen, and rather disposed to make merry. They had got over their first fear, and the native guard had given them visions of glorious things—women and loot and killing.

Stefano said very little, but omitted his prayers. He felt, dumbly, that God had already omitted him from His care of the universe.

Then ensued a hard three months for the recruits. They were taken up country to Arusha, and Stefano saw his first snow on the summit of Kilimanjaro. They were marched up the mountain side to a *boma* near a Lutheran Mission, whose clergy were all under arms except one old man, who preached to the recruits once or twice. It seemed God was tired with the English for their pride and sin, and that He had spoken to His friend, the great Emperor, telling him to set the people of Africa free from the yoke of the cruel English. So the great Emperor had gathered his armies, and already the English were being swept from the earth.

Stefano pondered these things and kept quiet. Maybe he remembered the old map, but he had not much time for reflection, since they put him into a uniform and gave him a rifle, a bayonet, and a knife, and drilled him with the rest from morning till night. The others grumbled much at first, and a man even refused to clean his rifle one day and sat in the sun instead. The next saw a solemn performance which impressed Stefano and the rest very much. They were formed up and marched under guard to the clearing before the *boma*, where a group of white officers were smoking and laughing. The offender then appeared between soldiers, and was stripped naked. He was then tied up to a framework of wood and flogged to death. Thereafter they all drilled satisfactorily.

And then the day came when they moved off. There was a stir in the *boma*, and soon the news got about that big guns from one of the victorious German men-of-war had been shipped up-country, ready for

an advance on the British Uganda Railway. Three companies strong, the new levies moved down to Arusha to join a considerable force there assembled. A week's marching took them well into British territory, and with never a casualty. It was an exciting march: one day, at least, had brought them the spoil of an enemy's village, and Stefano's companions had seen blood on their knives. He himself had kept apart from the night orgy. Indeed, one of his officers, coming on him sitting apart, had asked him, as he sprang up to attention, why he was not "over there." There, in the light of the fire, a score of half-dressed *askaris* drank beer from the hands of the terrified women who were forced to supply them. He had merely saluted again, and had as promptly been knocked down. He got up and said nothing, but he was a marked man.

So it was the close of the week that brought also the close of the story. A night march had carried them to within range of the British positions, apparently unseen. Stefano's company were set to line the thick grass at the head of a kind of glade beyond which lay the enemy's lines. There had been a grim speech from their white officer before they got into position, and every man knew it was serious business now, and death as possible behind as before. They lay there, those dark figures, a fit subject for the moralist. Drawn into a world-war for causes utterly beyond them, at the bidding of theories and movements as remote (and about as human) as the politics of Mars, they confronted, not merely the spears of native war, but every hellish device that science has perfected for the world's greatest civilisation fittingly to slay with. They knew nothing of them—nothing of the screaming, murderous hail of machine-guns, nothing of the irresistible shell that tears and maims

beyond recognition. Poor "cannon-fodder," as pitiful as the victims that ancient empires slew in sacrifice to bloody gods.

Stefano, of course, was as ignorant as the rest, and nothing in particular occupied his mind. There was that look in his eyes that the padre had seen years before, but he did not know it. He lay with the rest and waited for the word, waited till the last problem of his life was offered him.

Across the end of the glade began to creep a line of men unconscious of the hidden enemy. The keen native eye saw clearly the tense white faces above the khaki, and noticed the very muscles that gripped the rifles in their hands. The German officer waited a little for his best opportunity, and in that moment Stefano gave a short grunt of surprise. The German growled a low curse, and drove the muzzle of his pistol into the small of the boy's back. But Stefano was too amazed to care. There was one man of that file (who ought not indeed to have been there) who carried no rifle, and whose collar was marked by a black Maltese cross. That would have meant nothing to Stefano, but he knew the face above the collar. Not since the priest had been transferred to Zanzibar, years before, had Stefano seen his padre.

"Charge!" yelled the German behind him. The black line sprang up and away, but only as the clatter of machine-guns broke out ahead. Not that it mattered to Stefano. He had leaped to his feet with the rest, but had taken no pace forward. For a second he stood motionless, with those troubled eyes, and the next he pitched sharply forward with a German bullet in his brain.

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That, at least, was what they gathered when, in

the evening, the British stretcher-party made their way through the glade up and down which the battle had swayed.

“Hullo!” said an officer, “that beggar was shot at close range from behind.”

The chaplain turned him over—and started. He searched his memory for the face, the while mechanically opening the tunic to see if there might be a cross. Instead he pulled out a greasy bit of string, and a medal of St. Michael. It lay in his hand in the fading light, till there was that in the eyes of the padre which dimmed his vision.

So they said the familiar words over Stefano’s body by the shine of the moon, and his name was on the padre’s lips—when next there was opportunity to set up a little altar—which was all they could do. But somewhere—if it be a “where”—Stefano was, maybe, finding things simpler than he had found them hitherto.

CHAPTER XIV

JUDAS

WE started together, Father Jim and I, on a Monday, and a curious turn-out we made. I rode Johnny, who (to me at least) always seems a wise beast; and that morning, with ears a bit back and eyes very cunning, he as good as remonstrated with me for going at all in such company. And no wonder. Edwin rode his beast with a bridle and saddle that held together by a miracle, and two friends accompanied him: the one in a cap of wild-cat skin and a blanket; and the other in an ancient deer-stalker, a coat that proclaimed, with difficulty, that it had originally been Norfolk, and a pair of riding breeches which might have been useful for bathing, but were certainly not up to much for riding. Then there was Benet, combining business with pleasure, and burdened with an overcoat, a cassock, two blankets and a pile of books, in addition to his usual kit. Then there were two packs, the one a Government turn-out, kindly lent, and incredibly smart; the other an affair belonging to the Mission and composed of the *débris* of three or four of its predecessors. The bags of this were small, so that most of the burden had to ride outside; and a frying-pan and a kettle, balanced neatly on either side of the roll of blankets, lent a further gipsy air to the turn-out.

However, Edwin's two friends parted with us the next morning, and set off for Sehonghong, a three days' ride through, for the more part, uninhabited country, with no more visible sustenance than the

bread they had saved from their breakfast ; and when we left the Caledon Valley, the boys and packs went on ahead, and left me to accommodate myself to Father Jim's leisurely pace. In the remote and mosquito-haunted parts from which he hails, they do not ride horses—as he, unnecessarily, assured me. But we were in no haste, and he and I had a deal to say to each other. Except that I didn't much like the look of the weather, it did not matter whether we got to Mont aux Sources that week or the next.

We ambled on, therefore, talking desultorily—and to a stranger, had there been one, uncomprehensively, for words of many languages obtruded, and we mostly spoke of our craft—until he noticed an extraordinary person bounding down the side of the mountain towards us. His dress was a loin-cloth and a sheep-skin, and he had a big staff in his hand. He leapt from rock to rock, now out of sight, and now nearer as he came into view again, until he was near enough to be hailed.

“ Hail ! ” said I politely in Sesuto. “ Why do you hurry ? ”

“ *Lumela, Morena,* ” said he. “ *Ho nale molumo oa pula !* ”

“ What does he say ? ” asked Jim, as the fellow ran on. “ He looks for all the world like a Jewish prophet.”

“ Well,” said I, “ and so he might be. Anyway, a Jewish prophet once said exactly what he said : ‘ Hail, King, there is a sound of rain.’ ”

“ Good Lord ! ” said the father unfatherly, half reining up in astonishment, “ and there is the ‘ Man's Hand ’ ! ”

Sure enough, there was. Over the high ridge that hid our view, into the almost cloudless blue, was

sailing a small, black cloud. Almost at once, too, the wind got up around us, and the air became filled with that strange, low sound that one hears in lands of sudden storms—"the sound of abundance of rain." The heavens grew black with amazing rapidity. We urged our horses on, and, when we almost despaired of shelter, topped a rise, to see ahead of us a wall of cliff, and a large natural cave in which the packs and boys were already sheltering.

"Half-way House!" I exclaimed, "by all that's lucky! It's the big cave in which travellers who climb the mountain often stop the night, though I did not recognise the road to it, as I have been before, as I told you, by the road from the Hoek."

"Well, we shall spend the night there, too, I should say," said Jim, "unless the weather changes as quickly as it came."

He was quite right. The water came down in sheets. One bathed by standing outside the overhanging shelf, and never for a second did the noise of it cease until after we had made our fire of dried dung, and eaten our evening *skoff*, and lit our pipes before the blaze. I must say I was perfectly content. The place was a little goaty, for its normal use is to shelter goats, and the floor was mainly fit for *liso* fuel such as that which burned on the fire, but that was on the whole a convenience, for one had only to scrabble a handful of the carpet to replenish the blaze. But it grew still more pleasant as the night fell. The earth-smell was fresh and clean as it blew in. The stars came out by companies. And finally the moon rode high, and the shadows stole off the valley at our feet.

By mutual consent, we got out our office-books, and when we had finished I spoke what was in his mind, too.

"Extraordinary coincidence," I said. "You

noticed that the evening lesson was of Elijah and the rain ? ”

“ Yes,” said he. “ I’ve known the same thing before now.”

“ What, of Elijah ? ” I asked.

“ No,” said he, “ not of Elijah, but equally strange coincidences of other people.”

He paused rather abruptly. “ Whom ? ” I asked, expectantly.

“ Well,” he answered, “ you’ve just brought the story to my mind. It isn’t very pleasant.”

“ I couldn’t help it,” I persisted. “ Of whom is it ? ”

“ Judas,” said he, and fell on silence.

“ It’s no good, Jim,” said I, after a little, “ you must tell me the story.”

And he did.

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“ When I was first ordained,” he said, “ I went to a Mission in which were two other men, both my senior : the Rector, a very able priest, and his colleague, an extremely pleasant person a little younger. Father Gerard was one of the most delightful people I have ever met, and a great success. He had an admirable gift of genial repartee, and a perfect fund of stories, so that he made the best dinner companion in the world. He was always being asked out, and as either the Rector or myself were usually included in the invitation, we were rather glad of it. He had a rollicking way with the poor, too, and got in the dues with more success and less trouble than either of us. Then he had a great power in the pulpit. I’ve seen a packed congregation moved to the last man, and he never hesitated to make them smile either. His confessional was crowded, too ; he certainly confessed the majority of the women in the parish. And

children loved him: there was no escape from that. Old Sister Mary Ancila used to vow that the very babies did not cry when he christened them!

"He and I were very good friends. I confess I liked him. I used to think that he rather loved his success, and that he rather grasped after it, but otherwise he was always companionable. He'd come in most evenings that we were both free, and often help me in the sermons I found rather difficult. He'd sit opposite the fire in my big chair, smoking, and toss off, in a minute, thoughts and expressions that would have taken me an hour or two to work out; and he'd do it in his merry way, laughing at my hesitations if he suggested anything a little unusual. 'Well,' I would say, ruefully, when he had finished, 'the only trouble is that everybody will know that it is you and not I.' 'Not when you're in the pulpit,' he would return banteringly.

"Well, then, so things went, till the second of November, All Souls' Day. I was to sing the big Mass, and Father Gerard was to say one first, for a particular person whose year's mind it was, which meant that he was up nearly an hour before me. I was just finishing dressing when I heard a hurried step on the stairs, and the door of my room was pushed violently open. Gerard stumbled in, in his cassock, with a face white and drawn and horror-stricken as if he had aged ten years and seen a tragedy. I dropped my hair-brush and rushed towards him.

"'Whatever is it, Gerard?' I demanded.

"He said not a word. He just stood gazing at me with those terrified eyes, swaying slightly. 'Whatever is it, old fellow?' I repeated.

"With that, he opened his mouth as if to speak, but no sound came, only he staggered forward a foot or two, and fell on the bed.

"I was by him in a moment. 'Are you ill?' I asked. He shook his head. 'Well, I'll call the Rector,' I said, 'anyway'; but at that he seized my arm and shook his head still more.

"'All right,' said I, 'but I'll get some brandy: that will pull you round.'

"I fetched the spirit, and after a bit he seemed better.

"'Now, what is it?' I repeated.

"'The Host,' he said stumbly; 'it was taken from my hands.'

"'Taken from your hands!' I said. 'What do you mean, man? Was there sacrilege done? Speak up.' I shook him. 'Perhaps we ought to do something at once.'

"'Not that,' he said feebly, 'not that. Nobody took it. It went.'

"'What?' I echoed. 'Come, Gerard, pull yourself together and tell me. How could it go? What do you mean?'

"I got the story out of him at last, and when it was over, stood staring there, almost as upset as he was. This is what he said.

"He had vested and gone to the altar as usual, and had gone on with Mass perfectly normally. He made the oblations, said the *Sursum Corda*, and the *Sanctus* and the *Benedictus*, and began on the Canon as usual. He had blessed the sacred elements according to the rubric and was sure that nothing was wrong, but after he had raised his eyes for one minute, saying: 'Hear us, O merciful Father,' on lowering them again, he saw that the priest's Host was gone. In his own words:

"'I was amazed, Jim. I was positive that the wafer was there a second before, and equally it was not there then. My first thought was that perhaps

the vestments had brushed it aside at my movement, but it was not on the floor. Then I thought a gust of wind had perhaps blown it along the altar, but it was not there, and besides there had been no wind ; then I suppose my feelings overcame me, for I swayed a bit, and the server—that big chap, Thomas, you know, leaned forward and said : “ Are you ill, father ? ” I think I said : “ There’s no Host,” or something like that ; anyway, he looked perplexed, and whispered : “ I saw you place it, father.” Then I think I stood a minute staring at him, for he whispered at length : “ Shall I get one, father ? ” And then I said : “ No : vestry,” and he helped me down. I had wit enough to fold the corporal and bring the chalice away, and then I threw off my vestments and came to you. Oh, Jim, Jim, I’m accursed !’

“ When he had finished, I stood as I have said ; then I asked : ‘ Was there anyone in church ? ’

“ ‘ Just Mr. Lancing and his daughter ’ he replied, naming the father and sister of the dead girl for whom he had been saying Mass.

“ ‘ They’ll suppose you ill,’ I said, ‘ and they’d better ; but come, Gerard, this is madness ; I’ll go and see for myself.’

“ ‘ All right,’ he said, ‘ I’ll wait here.’

“ I slipped on my cassock and went down to the hall. I was just stepping into the sacristy, when the bell rang, and guessing who was there, I opened it.

“ ‘ Is Father Gerard ill, father ? ’ asked Mr. Lancing.

“ ‘ Yes,’ said I, ‘ but nothing much. I’m so sorry about the Mass ; I’ll pray for Edith myself, especially at High Mass.’

“ He said something, and turned off, when his daughter added : ‘ Tell Father Gerard, father, will you, that I’m so sorry, but I hope it won’t matter ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ said I, and passed on to the sacristy.

“ On the table were the tumbled vestments. I went over to the place before the crucifix where the chalice stood, and uncovered it. Then I think I was nearly as amazed as Gerard had been. In the paten lay a priest's Host.

“ I called Thomas, who was lingering in the vestry. No, he had not touched the vessels. He had done nothing but take off his cotta and cassock. He hoped Father Gerard was not ill.

“ I sent him home and walked slowly back to my bedroom. I supposed, inwardly, that Gerard must have been really ill, but it was an extraordinary illness. The Host lying where it did, it must absolutely have been that he did not see it. Yet he said he had placed it as usual on the corporal. Then how could it possibly have got back to the paten, or why should he not have seen it there? I was utterly bewildered, and if everything had not looked so ordinary, I should have been frightened.

“ ‘ Well ? ’ queried Gerard as I went in.

“ ‘ The host was on the paten beneath the veil,’ said I. He stared at me. ‘ But I—perhaps Thomas found it ? ’ he ventured.

“ ‘ He said not,’ said I.

“ Again a silence fell between us. ‘ Come,’ I said at length, ‘ you must have been ill, Gerard. I met Lancing at the door, and his daughter Ruth, and gave them to understand so. You'd better lie down. I'll tell the Rector you're not well. The Lancings said they hoped you'd soon be all right, and that it wouldn't matter.’

“ ‘ The Lancings ? ’ he asked sharply.

“ ‘ Yes, who else ? ’ I said patiently, thinking him still unwell.

“ ‘ Did the father or the daughter say that ? ’ he repeated.

“ ‘ Oh, the daughter, I think,’ said I, ‘ but go and lie down now.’ ”

“ The morning passed, and at lunch Gerard said he was better. (We just told the Rector that he had been taken faint at Mass and kept silence otherwise between ourselves.) After lunch he said he should go round and see the doctor and get a medicine of some sort, and I went off visiting. At tea the Rector and I were alone, but we thought nothing of that at all until, just as we finished, the maid knocked at the door, and said to the Rector :

“ ‘ Mr. Lancing to see you, father.’ ”

“ ‘ Oh, show him in,’ said the priest, ‘ and bring another cup. No, don’t bother ; Father Gerard is out, and his will do.’ ”

“ She went out, and in a minute Lancing came in.

“ ‘ What’s the matter ? ’ we exclaimed simultaneously at sight of his face.

He shut the door. ‘ Where’s Gerard ? ’ he said.

“ ‘ Out,’ said the Rector, surprised at his abruptness. ‘ Why ? ’ ”

“ Lancing seemed about to speak. Then he choked a little in his throat, made a movement, and pushed a paper into the Rector’s hands. ‘ Read that,’ he said. It was a short letter.

“ ‘ Dear Father (it ran),

“ ‘ When you find this, I shall have left home. You know I have always wanted to do so, and for a long time I have not believed the Faith as you and Mother believe it. I’m going to be married, and as you would not have liked it in any case, and there is a reason why it must be done quickly, it is better done so. Try and forgive me. ”

“ RUTH.”

“ ‘ Mr. Lancing, I’m so sorry ’—began the Rector, correctly, and then saw something in the other’s face. ‘ Good God,’ he said, ‘ you don’t mean—Gerard ? ’ ”

"The other made a quick gesture. 'The servant saw them leave the house together at a little after two,' he said hopelessly.

"None of us said anything more, I remember. The Rector sat with his head in his hands; Lancing, coldly as I thought, poured himself a cup of tea. I stared at him foolishly, and tried not to remember a thousand little things that looked like the conclusion we dreaded. 'Just go to his room and look,' said the Rector to me presently. It did not take a minute. A handbag and a few toilet necessities had gone. There was no letter. I came back. They both looked up as I opened the door. I remember I just nodded.

"Well, we had to do the work. I said Evensong and the Rector read the lessons. As he got into the second, his voice faltered, and recalled me. He read:

" 'Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray Him unto them in the absence of the multitude. . . .

" 'And when the hour was come, JESUS sat down and the twelve apostles with Him, . . . And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My Body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the New Testament in My Blood, which is shed for you.

" 'But, behold; the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table.'

"On my honour, I had hardly remembered the events of the morning in the shock of the evening. But at that I looked up and saw where the hand of

him who had planned so gross a betrayal for that very day had lain upon the table. And as I remembered the sign, I feared for myself, lest I—one day—might—Satan is very strong. , . .”

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Father Jim leaned forward and held his hands nearer the fire. I looked at the set, stern face, and wondered at how it had changed. But I ventured to ask : “ What of him now, father ? ”

“ Oh, you’d know the name, probably, if I told you,” he said, rather bitterly. “ The modern Judas puts out his thirty pieces of silver to a good interest, and doesn’t fool it away. He and his clever wife are big people, very popular, too, and charitable, She’s a Unitarian I believe ; I don’t think he goes anywhere. . . Let’s turn in : It is night.”

CHAPTER XV

THE MIDNIGHT MASS

THE small sounds of the hospital ward only seemed to emphasise the silence of the night. A man muttering or groaning in his sleep ; the fall of a coal in the grate ; the creak of a bed as a patient turned restlessly ; and those strange cracks that sound in the boards, however truly laid ; all these the watcher noted one by one. Then, far away, a clock told the hour, and the sleeper stirred.

“ Was that eleven, father ? ” he asked in the faint voice the other hardly knew.

“ Yes,” said the priest ; “ But you go to sleep now.”

“ Eleven,” said the other, half to himself ; “ the bells will go for the Midnight Mass soon—all over the world will they ring. God must be glad that His Church watches with the shepherds and angels and the holy dead, while the heathen sleep. And the angels and the dead are glad too. I shall be glad soon. Glad to be able to watch, too. . . . Father ! ”

“ Yes,” answered the other again.

“ Did you know that the angels and the dead were glad of the Midnight Mass ? ”

“ Well ”. . . hesitated the other ; “ yes, I think so. Only not specially of *that* Mass. But you must sleep now.”

“ Sleep ? I can’t sleep more now. I don’t want to sleep. I’m in no pain now, and I would rather lie awake like this till perhaps I shall hear the bell of His birth in some church. I think I shall hear the bell of His birth, and perhaps I shall see Him, too, by twelve

o'clock. Besides, I want to tell you something. I must. I have never told anyone—about the angels and the holy dead at the Midnight Mass. It was in Africa, you know; the year before I volunteered, the first year of war. May I tell it you, father? "

The watcher glanced round uneasily. He really did not know what to do. He was under strict orders to see that the sick man—a badly wounded priest-soldier from the Somme—lay still and slept. They had been friends long ago, but the one had gone to South Africa, and the other had become engrossed in a big English parish, until the war had thrown them together again. It had thrown them together strangely too. He had become a regular visitor at the new military hospital in the parish, and one evening, as he was about to leave, he had been called to a new case. It was his old friend who had enlisted in 1915, and fallen at last on the Somme. He was very ill, they said. So he had asked to watch the night by his side, for the sick man knew him, and seemed to wish it. He had gone for the Sacraments, and done all he could that way. He would never forget, he told himself, how eagerly, but how weakly, the soldier, who was a priest himself, had told his sin, and received our Lord, and then, with the Anointing scarcely over, had folded his hands and slept. It had not seemed that he would need to watch for long.... But what now should he do? He glanced round again for the nurse.

The other moved ever so little. "Father," he said, "let me call you 'father,' Tom, for it's the priest I want in you so badly now—don't worry. I'm all right. Don't call nurse. I just want to tell you something which I ought, I think, to have told before. Then I'll sleep. I can do it easily, if you'll bend a bit to listen. It's not a long story. . . ."

The listener felt a great surge of tenderness rise in him. He slipped to his knees, and took one of those weak hands. "All right, old fellow," he said, "tell me—just as you like; I'll understand."

So the other told. He did not look at his listener as he spoke, partly, perhaps, because he was so wounded that he could not easily turn his head; but to the priest it seemed that the dying man saw again, as the sentences trickled painfully out the things that he had seen. In any case, time and place slipped away to that listener. He was in the African village under the clear shining of the moon, with the crickets busy in the shaded trees.

"Christmas, 1914, it was, Tom, and we had a very busy time. I think I wrote you once about the parish. There's a little path runs down from the Rectory, past some big deodars, to the gate in the wall; and across the road, by itself in an open space of grass, stands the church—the Church of our All-Holy and Merciful Saviour, they called it, an Eastern dedication I think. Then beyond the church is the wall of the sisters' garden, and that, too, has a little path that runs through trees to St. Mary's—a very beautiful little place, it always seemed to me. I expect it was ordinary to them, but it seemed holy to me. The flowers seemed holy there—I don't know why. Imagination, I suppose. . . . (He paused a little. The other knelt on silently.)

"What was I saying? Oh yes! that Christmas. We had a very busy time. All the communicants were in church for a preparation about eight p.m.—full it was, and we had many confessions afterwards. I had been shriving all day, and when the last left me about ten, I was very tired. They couldn't help coming late, you know. Poor souls—it is a long way from some of the out-stations. When will we

have simple native priests? They will try to teach them so much that's no good. The folk want sacraments, not Jewish history. . . , But that's not it. . . I must go back. . . Where was I? . . .

"Oh yes, I remember. Well, about ten I thought I must just go and lie down for an hour. I was a bit ashamed to go because of what the Master said—you remember: '*Could ye not watch one hour?*' But I went. I was very tired, Tom. I'd been thinking furiously about the war, you see, and I'd made up my mind to go, although nobody knew it then. But I was not sure that I was right, and so I was worried. I didn't watch. That's just it—I did not watch. . . . Not then nor afterwards. So is it written: '*And when I looked there was no man—no man*' (his voice tailed off).

"Well, I went to lie down. I don't think I slept. Anyway, at eleven I got up wide awake, and I bathed my face and hands in cold water so that I was quite fresh. There was a little wind blowing when I opened the door: I could hear it among the trees: and there was a full moon. It was like Paradise out of doors. I could see the mountains, all black and silver, through the trees, and there was a sweet scent of tobacco-plant flowers in the air. I thought our Lord must have arranged it so that night for the joy of His Mother.

"So I walked down to the gate, and when I got there I saw three men standing in the path, their backs to me. They wore blankets as our people do, and they were looking through the gate across the road. They did not move as I came near, and I thought they could not have heard me. I wondered what they were doing there at that time, too, so I greeted them and said: '*Do you want anything?*'

"But they took no notice. I thought they could

not have heard, so I spoke again, and stepping between them, put out my hand to the shoulder of the nearest. Then I knew in a second, for I touched nothing.

“ ‘ *A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have* ’—that was what I thought suddenly, I don’t know why. Maybe our Lord said it to me that I should not be fearful, thinking of Him. Anyway, I was not a bit afraid, and it did not seem strange that I should not be. I just passed between them, and stepped to the gate, opened it, and went through. Then I saw that the grass was covered with people, in twos and threes, some moving, some sitting. I walked on as one who walks on air. I don’t know now who they were—some our own living folks, perhaps, and some the dead. But I did not think at all—that is the strange part of it. I just walked right through them to the little porch, touching no one and speaking to no one, with that strange exultation thrilling through me.

“ You won’t know the porch, father. It’s on the south side, at right angles to the building, and one can’t see those inside until one is within the porch itself. There is a door from the porch to the church, but only the entrance way from the porch to the outside, and I came in swiftly on rubber shoes.

“ In the porch I stopped to take holy water, and stood there, with my hand on the stoop, rigid. For the church was full of people. I had not expected it a bit. I thought, as always, that some would keep the vigil, but not that I should see the place full. The few benches were packed, but most of the people, as they have to do, sat on the floor tight together. The sisters, and a church officer or two, were moving about putting children into the pulpit out of the way, and so on; but the rest were still enough. They made some sounds, though. I should have said that

I heard, as it were, people sighing. I thought at first they were the dead, like those outside, but then I saw some I knew, and thought that all lived. Now I don't know who were alive and who were dead ; perhaps both were there....

"So I passed in. I was almost laughing in my heart with gladness, and I touched little children, who smiled at me, that I might pass through to the sanctuary. There, then, I knelt, and since it wanted nearly twenty minutes yet to Mass, I took out my rosary, and said that we would say it together. Dark it was, inside, with only a lamp or two, and the sanctuary light. The white-draped altar and the candles gleamed in the glow, however, and as we sat or knelt, we prayed. 'JESUS—Mary,' 'JESUS—Mary'—the words rocked backwards and forwards among us, as we responded each to each. Oh! but it was the atmosphere of Heaven....

"Why does one not *want* that more, on earth, father? We get glimpses, you know, and they are so wonderful.... And yet, one does not even *want* them at times. Out there, in that Hell, I didn't want them. I doubt one does, in Hell.... That's the awful thing, father. Do you know what I wanted, out there? Yes, yes, you do know.... Oh, my God! that I should have wanted such things, and wanted them *there*...."

(The sick man's lips closed tightly. The watcher felt a tremor as of cold pass through him. He could not have spoken, only he pressed the hand he held ever so slightly, and he prayed—strange prayers. "Oh, my God! oh, my God!...." that was all he said.)

"Well, at twenty past—it's that now, father, isn't it? —I went to the sacristy. Oh, I love the Christmas sacristy! There was bruised fir before the figure of our Lady, and it smelled so sweet. They had lit the censer too, and the white and gold of the vestments

shone like a saint's robe. The boys looked eager and expectant: we were all wonderfully glad somehow. And so I got to the altar.

"We had a very simple Mass: we did not know any proper introits or things. They sang 'Once in Royal David's City' at the entry instead, and they did sing it well, too. I could hardly say the Preparation, with Philip and Peter, the dear, eager lads. And so it went on. I preached a little sermon—if you believe me, with shut eyes. I couldn't look at the people somehow. Indeed I never saw them until I turned for the *Sursum Corda*. I should have turned back I know, but I could not. I lifted my hands and looked full at them and saw—oh, father! what did I see?

"I hardly know. The church was one sea of faces in that dim light. It was one black sea. But the faces that gazed up to me were not all on the floor level, if you can understand. It was like looking at a packed theatre from the stage, where one sees tier on tier. It was not strange, you understand: quite natural rather—only the chairs and forms are not really in tiers. So I knew there were more than the living visible to me that night. And I looked up, and I sang—how it seemed to me that I sang!—

“‘*Lift up your hearts.*’

"And they replied to me, all of them. It was like the sound of many waters. It thundered about me; it beat upon my ears; it seemed to go on and on. I stood, as I thought, like one spell-bound for ages and ages while that reply rang in my ears—

‘*We lift them up unto the Lord.*’

"Then it seemed that it ceased, and as from very, very far away my own voice came to me, thin and clear—

“‘*Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.*’

“ So I turned back to the altar, and soon, as our custom was, I was kneeling on the bottom step with the boys about me, while acolytes placed lighted candles on the altar, and we all sang together—

“ ‘ *O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem. . . .* ’

“ The rest of the Mass was, for me, on a lower key, as it were. I was just happily elated, no more, only as we passed down to the Crib singing our Mary hymn at the close of the Eucharist, I looked right and left on the faces that I passed, and there were none but the living there. Nor did I see more that night.”

“ Yes, father, I know what you are thinking—that it was a beautiful dream, born perhaps of my fasting and weariness; but listen. I said nothing to anyone—I have not to this night—but two days later the principal sister of our little branch-house came to me.

“ ‘ Father,’ she said. ‘ Will you please say a Mass with special intention for me ? ’

“ ‘ Why, yes, sister,’ I said, ‘ gladly. For what shall I say it ? ’

“ She hesitated. ‘ I don’t quite know how to say it,’ she said, ‘ nor if I shall ask aright. Can one pray for the heathen dead ? ’

“ I started, and stared at her. ‘ The heathen dead ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ Yes,’ said she. ‘ Supposing, father, some—many—had died here, as they have died, who never had a chance of hearing, might one not pray for them ? ’

“ ‘ Sister,’ said I, ‘ you have something to say. Tell me.’

“ ‘ But I hardly like to, father,’ said she, clasping

and unclasping her hands. 'You may think me foolish, but it is like this. On Christmas Eve, as I was leaving the church, the last of all, to go home, I was surprised to find many people on the path leading to the Home. The people wore blankets, but I could not see their faces in the shade. Half-way to the gate, there were some who blocked my path, and I asked them to move. They did not take any notice, so I put out my hand to pull at the blanket of a woman. Well, father, my fingers closed on the blanket, and passed through it; there was nothing there. I wasn't in the least frightened, only as I went quickly home I saw that the garden, too, was full of them. I went to sleep quite easily, feeling only very, very grateful for that wonderful Mass and the way the people sang. But now I feel that God sent me that vision for some purpose, and that maybe the dead who have died here are *hearing the voice of the Son of God*, and need our prayers.'

"She ceased, and I stared at her a little long. 'I am sorry, father, if you think it foolish . . . she began; but I cut her short. I had decided to say nothing, but just to offer the sacrifice. I thought it was better, perhaps, for her not to know that I too had seen.

"'It is not a bit foolish, sister,' said I. 'I think you should thank God for His great mercy, and I will sacrifice for all poor souls as soon as I can.'

"But, oh, Tom, even then I did not know! I did not see why God had sent me the vision, and I went to the Front and left my people. My hands are red with blood, now, father. . . . But yours are not. Will you go on with my masses, father, each year, as soon after Christmas, always, as you can? Will you?"

The other knew that his eyes were full of unshed

tears, but he did not care. "Every year, old man, every year," was all he said—huskily.

And then, in the silence, the sick man half moved again. "Do you hear it, Tom?" he whispered, "do you hear it?"

"What?" cried the other, a little fearful.

But the sick man answered Tom not at all.

"*It is meet and right so to do,*" he sang in a feeble, choked voice, but with his eyes afire. . . .

At that voice the watcher bent his head to his hands and cried on our Lord, and so stayed. Nevertheless it was but a few seconds later that he heard the sound of the nurse behind him as she moved closer to the bed.

"He is with them, father," she was saying brokenly.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ACTS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES

HALSBURY is only twenty miles from London, and when the 5.20 King's Cross express from the North pulled up there, the very engine itself seemed annoyed at the break in the run almost on the terminus. The 5.20 usually slid through Halsbury with a roar, the half-dozen-odd people on the sleepy little platform backing against the wall of the station to let her pass. But she stopped for each of the three days of the big horse market, and found a Halsbury transformed. So it came about that the young man who stepped out smartly with a suit case in one hand and a small gladstone in the other, and then turned to pull out after him an overcoat and a few books, found himself unaided in that operation and equally abandoned afterwards.

He collected his goods, and looked about him as if expecting to be met. The little place seethed with horsey-looking individuals, and the occasional porter who met his eye appeared to be engaged on business of life and death. Merton himself stood irresolutely for a little, accosted a person in uniform who had scarcely time to jerk out "Busy, sir," and then walked the length of the platform inquiringly. Nobody had so much as a glance for him. He found himself back at his luggage in a little, and stood by it to wait till the train left the station. "I'm in for it now," he said to himself, and pulled out his pocket-book to make sure of the clue. "'Anathoth,'" he read slowly. "Blest if I know how to pronounce the name even!"

The inevitable whistle came at last, and the 5.20 snorted herself off. The crowd thinned a bit. Merton caught sight of a porter mopping his face with a red handkerchief, and darted at him. "I say," he said, "I expected to be met, and there's nobody here. Do you know a house named 'Anathoth' hereabouts?"

"Named what, mister?" said the man.

"'Anathoth,'" read Merton, pulling out the card again.

"Never 'eaid no name like that, sir," said the porter—"outlandish sort of name. Can I have a look at the card, sir?"

"Yes," said Merton, and handed it over.

"The Rev. Father Borromeo Mary Sidonia,

Anathoth,

Halsbury,

read the man stumblingly: "No, sir, ain't never 'eard of 'im, sir," he said. "Sounds foreign like. I'll ask my mate." He went off, and returned with another man in a minute or so.

The two of them turned the card over and shook their heads. Merton began to be anxious to be off, and tried an explanation. "He is a Catholic priest," he said, "and lives about a mile away, I think."

"Lor' bless me, Bill," exclaimed the other porter, "'e means the priest up at the Cross!" And then, turning to Merton: "Is that who you mean, sir?"

"I don't know anything about the Cross," said Merton, "but it's a Catholic priest who lives at 'Anathoth,' Halsbury, that I'm wanting, and I don't suppose there are two about. How can I get out to the Cross, anyway?"

"'E wants the priest at the Cross!" said the first man, staring at him, and Merton became conscious that both were looking at him queerly. An inspector

joined the group and had the news broken to him. He stared likewise. Merton began to feel foolish. "Well, how can I get there," he said impatiently. "Is there a cab about?"

The inspector roused himself, and picked up the gladstone. "No, sir," he said, "I don't think so. Town's very full to-day, sir. But I think they've got a trap at the Railway Arms that'll take you out. Come this way, sir."

At the Railway Arms, Leonard Merton discovered that his desire to go to "The Cross" provoked the same kind of surprise as before. The ostler thought "as 'ow, if the gen'leman really *did* want to go to the Cross," they could find a trap to take him; but when, in half an hour or so, he drove out of the station yard, it was to leave a little group behind him, staring after the departing trap as if they expected to see neither it nor its occupants again.

Merton thought he would glean a little information. "Has Father Borromeo been here long?" he asked his driver. That worthy flicked up his horse and moved a bit on his seat before replying oracularly, "Not so long, sir."

"Are there many Roman Catholics hereabouts?" hazarded Leonard, after an interval.

"So and so, as you might say," said his Jehu.

"Whereabouts is the house?" pursued his passenger cheerfully.

"You'll see it in a minute or two, sir," was the answer—"over there"; and the whip indicated the north-eastern horizon with a generous charity.

Merton gave it up at that, and followed his own reflections as the trap jolted down the country lane. He had met Father Borromeo the term before at Oxford, at an "At Home," given chiefly for Roman Catholic students, to which he had been taken by a

friend. Merton was perplexed by the phenomenon of Catholicity, and the arrival of Father Borromeo after thirty-odd years' exile in the heart of South America had given him the chance of meeting a genuine Catholic missionary of the old type. He remembered his introduction to the spare, quiet figure in the old cassock who seemed so out of place among the teacups and trivial talk, and who nevertheless carried himself as if he created his own atmosphere, and was not troubled at all by that in which he might chance to be. "May I introduce Mr. Merton, father?" his friend had said; "he is very interested in American Missions;" and he could still recall his amazement as the old priest's face instantly lit up, his keen old eyes literally blazing with fire, the words pouring from him who had hitherto been silent with an utter disregard of what is usually considered talk for a drawing-room. One or two about them began to listen, he remembered, and he had felt a curious sensation of deception, so that he had said, seizing a chance pause: "I think I ought to tell you, father, that I am not a Catholic." And even now he had that strange sense, half of shock, half of fear, as the old man had instantly asked, without a trace of self-consciousness and without the faintest lowering of his voice: "Oh, but you love our Lord, do you not, Mr. Merton?"

They had seen each other twice and exchanged a letter or two since then, and so it came about that Merton was on his way, after a vacation in the north, to spend a few days at "Anathoth," which was some sort of monastery for a purpose a little indistinct to the visitor. He had purposely been vague as to the length of his stay. Would he get enough to eat? he wondered; and somehow he was already conscious that that atmosphere about the father carried with it a demand for complete response, or would create an intolerable

situation before very long. Merton was doubtful if he would respond at all, and he had a kind of feeling that if he submitted to it, his very world would be turned upside down. He almost wished he had not come, and yet he was conscious of an attraction to the old priest the like of which he had never felt before for anyone. Well, anyway, he could make an excuse and go when he pleased ; he was not in mediæval Europe or——

“ That’s the house, sir,” said the driver ; “ you can see the Cross.”

Merton glanced over the fields and gave a start of surprise. Towering above the hedges was a great black “ *tau* ” cross, the weirdest of all possible objects in the English pastoral scenery, and behind it, half-hidden as yet, a new, red-brick house. “ The cross is over the gate, sir,” added the man, without looking at him.

The trap turned a corner, and stopped in a minute or two before a gate and a house which caused the visitor to sit still on his seat for a minute in dumb surprise. Then he glanced round. Yes, it was an ordinary English lane of the home counties, and the house was a perfectly modern, biggish building, completed in red brick and blue slate, but in a garden mostly untended, except where some potatoes and cabbages grew healthily along the drive. A big coach-house stood a little to the right, but the yard had never been finished and obviously there were no horses. The gate was the biggish five-barred affair that you would associate with the house, but the enormous black cross he had seen sprang from the side-posts, and across the top bar, in black letters on a red ground, ran the words : “ The House where Jesus lives.” On one gate-post was painted an open Bible, and on the other the sign of the Blessed Sacrament.

“ This is the house, sir,” said the driver, looking

at him curiously, and recalling Merton to his senses.

“ Oh, yes,” he said, jumping down before that amazing gate as if he had been used to the like all his life ; “ sling out my bags, will you ? ” Just then, however, a lad of about eighteen, in a tattered pair of trousers and the shirt of a rustic, appeared from the garden in which he had apparently been working, and, all smiles, approached the visitor. Merton, supposing him to be the gardener, told him to take the baggage ; and, without paying him more attention, paid his driver, and turned towards the house. He was in time to see “ the gardener ” enter the front door with his bags, and as he reached the step, the father himself hurried out. “ Welcome to ‘ Anathoth,’ Mr. Merton,” he said ; “ we are delighted to have you. But when did you come ? Brother John met the 4.30 train, and when you were not in it, we thought you had put off your visit. But it doesn’t matter ; you are here. Come in. Come this way. Let me take you at once to the Author and Director of our work. Through here. Will you go in ? ”

As he spoke, Merton, who had been sufficiently surprised already by the hall, passed into a room on the right which he took to be the drawing-room—or whatever they called it—expecting to meet some other priest of whom he had not before heard. He was dumbfounded at what he found. He was in the chapel, and no one was there. He glanced back at his host, but he was already on his knees, and praying, as was evident, with a sincerity not for an instant to be denied. Merton glanced back ashamed. Then he noted the Tabernacle, and he, too, kneeled in an attitude of prayer. And the silence fell on them.

Looking back afterwards on the few minutes that followed, Leonard realised that in them he had his

first sense that this visit was to be utterly unlike anything that he had imagined or experienced. At first he knelt with his head in his hands, a little ashamed, very bewildered, and chiefly conscious that he was very glad of the silence. Then he silently surveyed the chapel, and his bewilderment so much increased that he was aware that it had passed into something deeper. And then—he has described it to me a little shamefacedly—an extraordinary change passed over him. He let his head sink into his hands again. For some unknown reason his emotion grew until he could have wept silently and gladly. He felt like a tired child who had found his mother's breast. Words that he had hitherto secretly known to be, beautiful as they were, no part of his eager life, forced themselves into his mind. He realised, suddenly, that his study and his pleasure, his zeal for debate and his religious search, had made him very tired. And here was "Rest"....

They left the chapel together, and went out to the bare-boarded staircase, the father going first, and Merton following silently. At the head, on a small table with a little lamp, stood an image of a brooding figure, three feet high perhaps, fashioned rather roughly but incisively in clay. Father Borromeo stopped before it and began to speak eagerly. "The image of our patron," he said, "St. Jeremias. Wonderful, don't you think? See how he looks down as if he could see the ruined Jerusalem at his feet and is making his lament over her. Yes, and he does see ruined Jerusalem, Mr. Merton. 'How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! How is she become as a widow! The ways of Zion do mourn because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate.... The Lord hath cast off His altar, He hath abhorred His sanctuary, He hath given up into

the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces Her gates are sunk into the ground ; he hath destroyed and broken her bars ; her king and her princes are among the Gentiles ; the law is no more ; her prophets also find no vision from the Lord.' Is it not so, Mr. Merton ? Look at the desolate altars in this land ! See the days of the Lord's feasts unknown, unhonoured ! And ' the law is no more ! ' Therefore God has called me to make Reparation—and I will, till ' the punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion.' ' I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath,' Mr. Merton Yes, and so Jeremias is our patron. God had told me to found this Order, but I did not know where or how or under whose protection. So I prayed, and slept. And in the morning there was a letter, and I saw that God had heard me. You know Sir Francis Scott, Mr. Merton ? Well, he had given a friend of mine an image of St. Jeremias fashioned after an idea which came to him as he heard the Lamentations read in church. He had made it, and given it to my friend, who was struck with the thought that I might like it—though he did not know why—so that it was God who sent it me after I had prayed and slept. So we have an image of our patron by one of the greatest of living sculptors ; we who could not have bought one a hundredth part as good ! Our miraculous image, I call it, Mr. Merton. Don't you think so ? See how he broods over the desolate altars, and prays too. ' Turn us again, O Lord, God of Hosts, and we shall be turned '—But I am keeping you ; will you come to your room, Mr. Merton ?"

Leonard had said no word while the old man, his fiery old eyes blazing as at Oxford, and his thin hand gesticulating, had poured out his confused story, and now he followed him, still without a word. They turned

down a passage with one or two big gloomy pictures on the walls (of which he was to know more later), and at the end his guide opened a door and he passed in. "I hope you will find all you need here, Mr. Merton," he said courteously. "If not, please ask for anything. And I will leave you now. Supper will be ready in about half an hour; you will hear a bell."

Leonard walked to the window the moment the door was shut and looked out. His room was in the front of the house, and he could see down into the unkempt garden. In the fading light the black cross bourgeoned out over the gate against the glow of the setting sun, golden and clear and bright. He stood and watched a little, and then turned back to look about him. He was still chiefly curious, and a little amused. The room itself was absolutely modern—high, light, spacious and spotlessly clean; but it was the furniture that amazed him. There was no carpet, and the walls were white-washed. In the middle stood a plain, unvarnished kitchen table with a penny bottle of ink, some paper, and a cheap wooden pen. Against the wall was an old packing case, scrubbed till it was white, bearing a few toilet necessities in tinware. The bed was of the barest iron, spread with blankets and a pillow, but with no sheets. A prie-dieu, obviously home-made, stood against one wall, with a Bible open upon it; and that, with one wooden chair of the kitchen variety, completed the furniture, except for the pictures and an image. This latter stood on the mantelpiece and Leonard contemplated it with growing disgust. Yet it held his gaze, so that in a while he sat on the bed to see it better. It was about two feet high, highly coloured, and old, of Spanish-American sixteenth-century art, and it represented our Lord at the Pillar. The hair of the head was real, and the figure hung from the hands as if half dead. The scourges had opened the flesh of the back

and sides, and the ribs showed through.... "How *ghastly*," murmured Leonard, and went to his bed as I have said; and then—"But I suppose it *was* like that. . . ."

There were three pictures in addition to the image. One, a Crucifixion, over his head, struck him as so horribly realistic that he never really learned to look at it, and the other two represented martyrdoms. In the first, a Jesuit priest suffered decapitation at the hands of Indians; in the other, Romans dressed as Spaniards were torturing the breasts of St. Agatha. . . . He went over and poured out water and bathed his face and hands. Well, and then the bell rang and he went down to supper.

Father Borromeo met him in the hall with a smile and ushered him at once into the refectory. There awaited him Brother John and two others, priests. Standing at the table Father Borromeo signed himself and intoned an antiphon, upon which, chanting a psalm, all five of them marched through a connecting door into the chapel for prayers, and so returned to supper. (Leonard preceded the Father and found he had a prie-dieu prepared for him in the chapel.) They sat down, and Brother John went for the food. Before each was an enamelled mug and plate, and a common knife, fork and spoon. The others ate bread and drank tea; Leonard was presented with a chop and some potatoes. Then all had rice-pudding, all except the father, that is. There was butter offered to Leonard, who took of it, but never again. He presumed it had waited for him since the last visitor. There was silence till all had finished, and in the silence Leonard struggled with his food and looked about him. The furniture was entirely plain, and there was nothing except the absolutely necessary, with one exception. That stood at Leonard's

left hand against the wall, and he did not notice it at first, since he was occupied with a crucifix on the mantelpiece as realistic as the scourging in his own room, and with two or three martyrdoms of the same period. But when he did, he nearly started to his feet. The exception was a glass-topped case of plain wood, such as one would see in a museum, and in it lay the body of a man, naked except for a loin-cloth, entire except for one arm, and incorrupt. It lay like white wax, still and calm, and the face seemed to smile. In a sense there was nothing repulsive, but something rather attractive, about it; but in such a place, at such a time.....! Father Borromeo noticed his start, and when grace had been said (with the same procession to the chapel) and they had seated themselves for the time which their rule allowed for recreation, he explained.

“I saw you noticed the body of our saint, Mr. Merton,” he said, “and I do not wonder. He is incorrupt, you see, and smiles. He is Father Juan Rodriguez, who was martyred in the Argentine in 1584, I think. He was a very saint, and converted thousands to our Lord, but the Indians killed him with the slow thrust of an arrow; look, you can see the wound in his side. You must hear his story some time. I found him at Notre Dame de Secours in the Argentine, buried under the floor of the refectory, and I brought him away with me. The arm is in Rome, and we await his Beatification. But we are sure of it; his relics and his intercessions have worked many miracles, Mr. Merton. I saw a blind woman cured, the day I found him, by the touch of a handkerchief that lay on his body, and many followed. It is always so with a saint, Mr. Merton. Do you remember: ‘God wrought miracles by the hand of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the

sick, handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them' ? ”

“ Yes,” said Leonard feebly ; and then : “ but how did you know the body was there ? ”

“ He came to me in a dream of the night and told me to dig there, Mr. Merton. Ah ! but God was with us in that city. We baptized seventeen hundred in one week, I remember. They cried out to be saved : the whole city seemed to come together. It is a holy country. Why, when I left, they asked me for relics, and I gathered a handful of the dust of the road for them. ‘ God is here, my children,’ I said, ‘ this is your relic ; it is holy land.’ ”

“ But if you baptized so many, did they not fall away, father ? ” asked Leonard.

“ Fall away ! ” cried the old man. “ No !—by the Grace of God and the power of the sacraments. Why, it was there that God gave us another saint, I am sure, though I do not think we shall ever hear of her. She was a young widow, and she had a little house and a poor garden near the church. She lived by selling what vegetables she could raise, but when she was converted, she asked to be allowed to keep the altar in flowers, and for that gave up more and more of her poor garden. She was told she could not spare the space to grow flowers ; but what do you think God did, Mr. Merton ? He made that poor, stony strip of ground into a Paradise. Such roses, lilies, orchids—you never saw ! People used to come miles to see that garden, and all around it was as poor and as bare as before. Her vegetables, too—a miracle ! On half the space she grew ten times what she had grown before. Why, she could have been rich, for her ; but she lived poorly till the end, and gave all the rest to others worse off than she. I have seen her face as the face of an angel, at the altar where she

fed daily, Mr. Merton. And when she died—cancer, but she never ceased to praise our Lord and His Mother—her grave blossomed with lilies that bloom to this day. ‘Such honour have all His saints.’ . . . But we rest early here. Mass is at six. May I show you to your room ? ”

They shook hands at his door, and within, Leonard stood bewildered for a little. I must say I should like to have seen him. Then he went over to his suit-case, and searched for some chocolate and biscuits, congratulating himself on his forethought.

II

Merton has never given me a complete account of his six days—for he stayed from Monday till Saturday, although that first night he had decided to leave on the Wednesday—but it is possible to piece the story together more or less. The next day, for instance, he became acquainted with the house ; and the effect, on the whole, although so overwhelmingly unusual and—if I may say so—grotesque, was to stagger him out of his first repugnance as of something unreal and theatrical. It was overdone, if that had been meant ; besides, in the chapel that second night a chance incident destroyed for ever any such conception. It appears that he found they had night-prayers after an hour of silence each evening which followed the recreation after supper, and he asked to be allowed to go. He had no book, of course, so Brother John passed him his. Idly he had glanced at the title-page, and there read :

John Valentine Debenham,

and beneath, a series of dates, which showed that the boy was really the same age as himself, and had been professed a year ago. Leonard glanced at him, and

then something of the meaning of it—little as he knew the reality—dawned on him. At twenty committed to a life like this ! And the face, unconscious of his watching, was gazing towards the Tabernacle with a smile on the lips and a light in the eyes which sent Leonard back to his own business with a lump in his throat. . . .

The house, then, had neither carpet nor china nor comfort from hall to attic. There was no utensil not of tinware ; and never a picture other than an extraordinary number—over eighty in all— of similar pictures to those in his room, valuable in their way, he guessed, and pictures which had been dug from hiding-places and given to the father by his Indian Catholics. The crucifixes and images, too, were all as he had seen in the refectory and in his bedroom. Then he had discovered that no one at any time took meat—only bread (hard as a bullet, said Leonard), tea, sometimes a little rice and tapioca and such like, and an occasional egg. As to Father Borromeo, it staggered Leonard that he ate practically nothing ; a little bread and water in the morning, no lunch (dinner they called it), and a little bread and tea for supper, that had been his menu that day. Leonard had even wondered if he ate secretly, but twelve hours had been enough to dispel any such illusion.

He had seen, too, where the father slept, and how, and that by chance. On going to his room after lunch, the father had asked another priest, Father Mark, to fetch for his visitor a copy of a compendium of scripture texts which he had made, and Merton had accompanied this priest for it to Father Borromeo's room. He had come out in a state of complete revolt. The room was perhaps eight feet by nine, an attic, and it was painted a dead black. The " bed " was a long, narrow,

black box, with one blanket to spread over its occupant and no mattress at all. Nor was there any other furniture, except a crucifix and a shelf of the books of which he had been given one. The old man of over seventy washed, in all weathers, at a tap in the yard beneath a lean-to of zinc, like the rest. Only one other object in the room had struck his eye, and that he recalled almost with a shudder. It was a small whip of wire and string, and the string was red. . . .

The chapel completed his amazement. It was quite small, pictureless, except for a small Mexican representation in one piece of the Stations of the Cross, our Lord starting from Pilate's Hall in one corner and travelling, in fourteen little scenes, along a winding road which ended in the opposite corner at the Sepulchre.

His prie-dieu was just before it, and he used to kneel and stare at it. Curiously enough, his thought was the utterly commonplace one that what it represented had really *happened*. It was as if he had never realised that before.

The altar occupied one side. It was compacted of a number of rough stones, unhewn, of varying shapes, a curious jumble. But all were lettered, and he learned that each stone had come from a desecrated church, many being from old English monastery churches, although most countries were represented. The crucifix was another of the Spanish-American things, only much bigger ; to the end he could scarcely contemplate it. Hung from the ceiling was a broken three-legged rush chair, much the worse for wear, strung up to keep it out of the way, with no attempt at concealment. He asked about that. " Why," said the father, tears in his eyes, " that will be a relic one of these days. Do you know who sat in that chair ? " (His voice sank to a

whisper and he gripped his guest by the arm.) “*The Blessed Cure d’Ars*, and I keep it till he is canonized. He sat in that to hear confessions, the saint of God, aye, sat day and night upheld by the love of God and the prayers of our Lady, that he might save the soul of France. . . . And God save it too,” he added brokenly.

But with it all, the courtesy and kindness of the old man and of the rest gripped Leonard like a spell. For instance the father asked suddenly at lunch, as if remembering a forgotten thing, if he liked marmalade, and at supper a jar stood by him. Then he had planned walks for his guest to a wood near, to a ruined abbey, to the town, and some books had appeared mysteriously on Leonard’s table because he had chanced to say how much he liked to read at night. And they had walked up and down the drive, he and the old man together who was too weak to go far, and Leonard had been more bewildered than ever at his talk. First, he could speak of nothing at all but of the love of God ; it was plain that no other subject existed for him. Then he had talked of his work and of his converts, with a simplicity and an affection and yet with an utter self-effacement that seemed to Leonard the most beautiful thing that he had ever heard, and mingled with it had been a humour and a commonsense that dumbfounded him, the more because, with it all, was interwoven a thread of the supernatural utterly beyond his hearer. Of course, you could discount it all. The old man gave no proofs—never, indeed, seemed to conceive that his visitor would want them, and never narrated a wonder as anything but the simplest and most natural of the works of God. Leonard was conscious that his evidence was worth nothing, and yet that, given the miracle of the man himself, there was no evidence wanted more. He

lived solely and only for God ; the scourge, the fasting, the poverty—fantastic if you like—was prompted solely by a sense of sin in the world and in himself ; and the hours that slipped so strangely and quickly away were spent in a labour of prayer which could not be denied, whether it were misspent or not.

Merton used to watch the old man like a person fascinated. He would kneel in chapel, his eyes wide open, his lips moving rapidly, his face rapt, his soul indifferent to time and space, and Merton would remember the tireless journeys, the complete self-surrender, the utter abandonment that had seamed and aged him. Or he would meet him in the corridor, the old father's face abstracted as always, until he would suddenly be aware of his guest, and would come back as from a far country, but with a ready and immediate courtesy which was very beautiful to see. Or he would sit at the table in the recreation hour, the candle-light flickering on that dreadful crucifix and that still, white form of the saint, and lighting momentarily, as it danced, the darker corners and the shaded faces of the others, and his expression would be live and eager as a young man's as he told what God had done before his eyes in that far-off world. The tales would be so human too—now humorous, with the human mixed with this amazing faith ; now simple ; now blackly, evilly tragic.

There was the Story of the Pill. “ Yes,” said the old father, “ we left Peru, Mr. Merton, despite all their warning and struck away for the Amazon and Brazil. The porters abandoned us at last, and we went on from tribe to tribe, I and my boy, with next to no luggage, preaching as we went. The people got more and more savage as we advanced, and each tribe warned us of the next and expressed astonishment that we had got through the last—which is human nature, Mr. Merton, the world

over. ("Were you not afraid, father?" interrupted Merton. "Afraid? no, why should we have been? God was with us," came the simple answer.) Well, at last we did jump into the fire though. We came to a village unusually silent, and we found that the chief's son, a lad of fifteen or so, was dying. But the chief brightened up when he saw us. We were straightway stripped of our goods and taken before him—a fat old savage with his men about him, but somehow I believed that he was really in grief about his son, and I even liked him then. He explained at once that he had tried goats, chickens, a bull, even a woman, by way of sacrifice to avert the evil, but that the gods had evidently sent us along. So we should die in the morning, and the doctor would make a medicine of our kidneys which would cure the boy. We looked on death then, Mr. Merton. So I said, Yes, he should kill us in the morning, but might I preach to them that afternoon, first? He said that that was a fair arrangement; so I begged the help of our Lady and St. Ignatius Loyola, and began. They did not object to a long sermon, so I told them the story of our Lord from the beginning."

Merton had a mental picture of the amazing scene; had it really taken place in the nineteenth century? He conjured up the green encircling forest of giant trees and creepers, the open space by the slow-moving river, the hum of brilliant insects, the background of brown huts, the listening savage and his circle of armed men, and the bearded priest in his torn cassock and uplifted cross preaching the story of JESUS and His love. He seemed to see it all in the keen eyes that looked into his.

"Well, Mr. Merton, I had just finished the raising of the widow's son at Nain (which was one of the miracles I put in) when the chief interrupted me.

" 'Where is that JESUS now?' he asked.

“ ‘ In Heaven, in the Sacrament of the altar in every church, and here,’ said I.

“ ‘ Here ? ’ he repeated.

“ ‘ Yes,’ said I, ‘ by my side and by yours, reading your heart, is the spiritual presence of JESUS Christ our God, according to His words : ‘ Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end.’ ”

“ The old chief glanced about uneasily : then he laughed. ‘ Good,’ said he, ‘ then if He is here, let Him cure my son.’

“ For a moment, Mr. Merton, I was silent, but then God told me what to do. ‘ Show me the boy,’ I said, and they brought him. Now, Mr. Merton, I had no medicines, only a box of calomel pills, with but one left, and I did not know what was the matter with the boy at all. But I committed him and myself to Almighty God and our Blessed Lady, and I gave him the pill. Then we slept. He was well in the morning, by the power of God, and I baptized the whole village before I left.”

But it was on his guest’s last evening that he related the story of the great horror. Leonard Merton had been told in Oxford that Father Borromeo had ‘ strange fancies ’ about the Devil and his works, but that, since he believed so deeply in the truth of what he thought he had seen, he could rarely be got to speak on the subject. So Leonard tried hard that night. The old man had been much moved, telling how his poor Indian converts had dug up the pictures and images in their houses—treasures long buried for fear of your modern republican South American—and had given them to him, in lavish generosity, for his new ‘ Anathoth ’ ; of how they had added, in all, the equivalent of twenty thousand pounds sterling for the conversion of Protestant England ; of how he had translated the Scriptures into the vernacular for them, and distributed three editions of 25,000 copies each ;

of how he had met with fierce opposition and abuse from the coast cities, and particularly from the German element ; and of how—told with a simple acceptance of diabolical agencies—he had fought with devils and beasts in the gambling hells and dancing saloons of San Francisco. Leonard drew out the story from that.

It opened ramblingly with an account of his early voyages, and of how this had occurred on the second in company with a number of German and German-Jew emigrants ; and Leonard had allowed his attention to wander to the faces about him and the strange room, particularly to the young priest—the younger of the two—who chanced to be opposite to him, whose grey eyes, lit with horror, never left the old man, and whose hand moved rapidly in the sign of the cross whenever the father spoke of the Devil. He was recalled by the old man's words.

“ In those days, Mr. Merton, the quarantine station was the island of Flores, a small sandy place in the mouth of the river, and there was nothing there but a desecrated chapel (there is a stone on the altar still), a dilapidated hospital, and the shanties for persons quarantined. So we were put there. I got a room to myself, but our passengers got drunk at dinner, and some of the men came round to abuse me with their wantons on their arms. I tried to pray in silence within for a little, but they hammered on the door, and at last I went out to see. The moon was up, Mr. Merton, and in its light lay bathed the bare island with its few twisted trees, the still sea, and their hot, lustful faces. It seemed God had spread His peace abroad on nature, but that the devil rioted in men. Away on the north beach was the old chapel, its broken windows showing black and empty in the moon. So I came out to them, and they cursed me and sought a quarrel, but when I could, I spoke to them in the Name

of God. Then one blasphemed the honour of God's Mother, and I cried in my youth : ' O God, show them the horror of hell that they may be saved ! ' The man who had spoken—a German-Jew—leaned forward and struck me in the face, crying : ' Damn your—God ; there is no hell ! ' And I answered him, lifting my hand, ' The mouth of hell shall open upon you, unless you repent ! '

" For a moment or two, Mr. Merton, that silenced them, but at last one cried : ' Come away ! Wine and women are better than this fool.' And they all took up his cry, streaming off with ribald songs. And then I saw, to my horror, as I stood in the door with blood on my face, that they were going to the chapel to fulfil their lust there. I tried to cry out to them, but even as I tried, the words died in my throat, *because I saw a light in the chapel.*"

The old man leant forward, and Leonard, overcome in spite of himself as much by his manner as his words, glanced round fearfully. Brother John was on his knees with his beads ; the priest opposite, white as the body of the saint. So it was he who whispered in the stillness of the room : " Yes, father ? "

" Well, as I looked, the light grew and grew—a lurid red light. One of the women saw it at last, and screamed out at it. They were near then, perhaps fifty yards away. But even as they hesitated, one man, with a curse, called them all to come, as he would like to see the Devil. And then—then—the light burned higher (it was as if there was a fire within the chapel), and with a yell such as I pray God I may never hear again, the Devil leaped out upon them.

" They fled, naked and wounded," went on the old man as if he saw it all again, and there was no interrupting him for an explanation, " and I thank God I had

the courage to go out with my crucifix and bring in him who had wished to see the Devil and his woman, who lay on the sand. I took them into the hospital, and I made holy water, and I prayed by them while they raved—oh, my God, how they raved! Oh, my children, but that was a night! Never have I seen such a night! All the time the chapel flamed and was not burnt, and the island resounded with the cries of the damned and the yells of the Devil. They even heard the noise in the town, and came off in a boat in the morning, when they dared, to ask us of it. But as for me, I prayed and prayed. The Devil himself tried to enter the hospital—every one had taken refuge there then—but I confessed and shrived them all, and then we told our beads—all, that is, but those that held the door and the two on the beds. All night through those two saw Hell opened before them. The Devil even clawed on the door to reach them, but he could not pass the crucifix, and with the dawn, God stretched out His Hand, and the gate of Hell was shut again. But in the morning light, when we opened the door, it was scored as with red-hot fingers from lintel to floor.”

“Oh, my God!” burst from the young priest; “and what then, father?”

“Except for the two, who died that day, God gave me all the souls in the place, my son. And we cleaned the chapel and did penance in it, and restored it as best we could, and at last I said Mass there. Our quarantine was a fourteen-days’ retreat, through the mercy of God. But we had seen the mouth of Hell opened upon us, and the Devil had taken two to himself.”

Back in his room, Leonard could not sleep. I

believe, truth to tell, that he was afraid. He drew every modern weapon from his armoury and used them, but he fell back on his New Testament at last. That was cold comfort, however. "Your adversary the Devil goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour," he read; and "In My Name ye shall cast out devils." Curiously enough, however, one other verse was even more disturbing, a verse that really seems far from the subject: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

III

There was no doubt about it, Leonard Merton was sorry to go next morning. As he dressed for the last Mass, he was amazed to realise that he had not touched his chocolate or biscuits for four days, and had not wanted them, and that a novel in his gladstone, which he had read half through the first day, was still unfinished. Also he was looking forward to Mass and breakfast more than the lunch in town he had planned for himself, which was the more amazing the more he thought of it.

Breakfast was, indeed, a sad meal. Just at the end, the old priest forgot himself for the first time, and, leaning over suddenly, burst out irrelevantly: "But Mr. Merton, it's so plain! Our Lord said: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock'—*petros, petra*, you know—'I will build my church.' And Peter *did* go to Rome, and our Lord *has* built His church upon him, and it *is* a rock. Can't you see? Why are you not a Catholic?" Merton gazed at him hopelessly—how could one argue with Father Borromeo?—and said helplessly: "Yes, father." And the young

priest looked up suddenly, and then down again ; and so they finished.

Brother John had carried his luggage to the station, as ragged and smiling as ever, and Father Mark was to walk with him there. They set out through that amazing gate which Leonard had somehow come to welcome as he came back from his walks, and Father Borromeo hardly spoke as they shook hands. He stood there in his greenish-black old cassock in the sun as they went down the lane, and waved pleasantly as they turned. Then Leonard and Father Mark went on for a little in silence.

"He is a wonderful man," said Leonard at length.

"Yes," said Father Mark, "and I thank God that I am with him.

"Will he go back to America, do you think, father ?" asked Leonard.

"Oh, no," said the priest. "He is dying ; the doctors only give him a year or two to live. But they say he may die sooner. He will die when God pleases," he added.

"Oh," said Leonard, and they walked another quarter of a mile. "Are there many of you ?" asked Leonard at length.

"Not here," said Father Mark, "but we have several other houses in South America. Here there are only Father Francis and Brother John in addition to myself and Father Borromeo."

"And have you been here long ?"

"Since Father Borromeo began, a couple of years ago, but I was professed in South America soon after I went out. Father Francis joined us last year ; Brother John two years ago. He came from the novitiate of another Order ; he was professed by special dispensation last year. Brother John will be

a great monk, if God pleases ; he has such a definite sense of vocation, and has had from his boyhood. I do not know how we should get on without him."

"He looks after the garden and kitchen, doesn't he ?"

"Yes ; he is our only lay-brother here, though two more are coming. He will be ordained soon ; indeed he gets sub-deacon's orders at Advent, I believe."

"Debenham his name was, wasn't it ? I saw it in his prayer-book."

"Yes," said Father Mark.

"Debenham," repeated Leonard. "Is he any relation of the Orfords ? It's their name."

"Yes," said Father Mark quietly ; "he is the eldest son."

"The eldest son of the Earl of Orford !" cried Leonard in amazement, stopping short.

"Yes," said Father Mark again, looking at him.

"But then he is a peer !" cried Leonard.

"Yes," said Father Mark, "or at least he was ; he gave up all title and place on his profession ; as far as could be of course."

"But," stammered Leonard, "a Viscount, and heir to the Orford estates ! What does his father say ?"

"The Earl is a Catholic," said Father Mark quietly.

"But..." began Leonard again, and was silent.

They walked on down the country lane, and Merton looked at the hedges and the sunshine in a kind of dream. He was thinking what it would be like to be the eldest son of an earl, and then of that bare house, of the dry bread, of the scourge, of the years ahead.... He saw again, against the beauty of the English summer, that devout face in the chapel, that white set face over the beads.

But Father Mark was speaking. "We had the honour of a visit from the Cardinal Archbishop, last month," he said, "and he definitely approved Father Borromeo's work. He will ordain Brother John himself. I think," he added half humorously, "that Father Borromeo rather feared his coming as His Eminence is an exceedingly practical man. But he approved all we do, and he asked for Father Borromeo's blessing before he left. Father Borromeo gave him a Madonna for his chapel, one given him by a poor Indian who was flogged to death in the ruins of his house not long after, and the Cardinal said he should value it as highly as anything he had. Have you seen the Cathedral, Mr. Merton? It is not finished, of course, but it will be a fine building. Some people say...." But Leonard heard no more.

"Does he never eat more than that?" asked Leonard suddenly.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Merton?" said the priest, surprised.

"Oh, I beg yours, father," said Merton in some confusion. "I was thinking of Father Borromeo.... I am sorry. But, father, why do you all do that?"

The priest looked at him gravely for a minute, and then he said: "I will explain if I can, Mr. Merton, but it may sound a little strange to you. You see, our Lord's mystical Body of the Catholic Church is spread throughout the whole world, and everywhere, and in every age, our Lord carries on through it, all that He did on earth. So He lives in humble homes, He heals the sick, He preaches to the poor, He offers Himself on Catholic altars—He is always in Nazareth, about Galilee and on Calvary again. And He is in Gethsemane too. I mean, some members of His mystical Body are called to live by prayer of a kind

that means no less than a veritable sweat of blood, and that because our Lord may then have to offer, as He once offered on the Cross, all that labour of prayer and pain on behalf of sinners and His enemies—Judas, Peter, Pilate, the Jews. In the Catholic Church there are Orders which accept that vocation of reparation and live for it always. Such is Father Borromeo's. We make reparation especially for insults offered to our Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar."

Leonard glanced at the quiet face of the priest beside him, and could not resist a vulgarity which he regretted the next moment. "And so you all use the discipline, and let your bread get stale?" he said.

"Yes," said Father Mark quietly and simply; and Leonard was ashamed.

They said no more till they reached the station, and as Leonard leant from his window he asked what he had never asked before. "Pray for me, father," he said, in some confusion.

"Why, yes," said the priest again, imperturbably.

Leonard threw himself back in a corner and watched the world slide by outside. He had not seen a paper for a week, and several lay beside him, but he did not open them. He scarcely moved till the express ran into King's Cross, and a porter flung open the door.

"Taxi, sir?"

"Yes," said Leonard, and climbed out into the common-sense, of London.

.

All this was some time ago now, and Merton rarely speaks of it. Indeed I would not write it down, if it were not that he never reads anything I write, on principle, and nobody else will recognise him. Not that we are anything but the best of friends, and I

must say I delight in a week now and again within the precincts of the cathedral of which he is an ornament. His wife is delightful, and they keep an admirable table. Besides, there is a certain air about the establishment, from the butler downwards, of dignified yet cheerful Conservative Anglicanism that is really rather restful. Merton subscribes largely to missionary societies, too, and he has even appeared on the platform of the Christian Social Union. But, as I say, he rarely speaks of Father Borromeo, and I know why. You see, if the Acts of the Apostles were really lived over again, it would turn the world upside down once more, which would be extraordinarily disagreeable to most of us. Fancy meeting St. Paul ! Fancy having met him, or his like, if only for the inside of a week

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